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# **SPELLBINDERS**

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**MARGARET CULKIN BANNING**



# SPELLBINDERS

BY

MARGARET CULKIN BANNING

AUTHOR OF "HALF LOAVES," "THIS MARRYING," ETC.

NEW,  YORK

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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**SPELLBINDERS. II**

**PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**



**TO MY FATHER**  
**WILLIAM E. CULKIN**  
**WHO HAS TAUGHT ME OF POLITICS**  
**AND PHILOSOPHY**



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# SPELLBINDERS

## CHAPTER I

### AT THE BROWNLEYS'

#### I

**G**AGE FLANDON put his wife's fur cloak around her and stood back, watching her as she took a final glance into the long mirror in the hall.

"I'm quite excited," she said. "Margaret always excites me and I do want you to meet her. She really must come to stay with us, Gage."

"If you like. I'm not so keen."

"Afraid of strong-minded women?"

"It's not their strong minds I'm afraid of, Helen."

"Their alluring personalities?" She slipped an arm into his and led him to the door.

"Not even that. Their horrible consciousness—self-consciousness. Their nervousness. Their aggressiveness. Most of all, I hate the idea of their effect on you."

"You sound as if whole cohorts of strong-minded rapacious women were storming the city instead of one old college friend of mine come to bolster up the fortunes of your own political party."

Flandon helped her into the automobile.

"You know what I mean," he said briefly.

He stayed silent and Helen Flandon left him to it. But even in the darkness of the car he could feel her excitement and his own irritation at it bothered him. There

was no reason, he told himself, to have conceived this prejudice against this friend of Helen's, this Margaret Duffield. Except that he had heard so much about her. Except that she was always being quoted to him, always writing clever letters to his wife, producing exactly that same nervous excitement which characterized her mood to-night. An unhealthy mood. He hated fake women, he told himself angrily, and was angry at himself for his prejudice.

"It's too bad to drag you out to meet her. But I couldn't go to the Brownleys', of all places, alone, could I?"

"Of course not. I don't mind coming. I want to see Brownley anyway. I don't mind meeting your friend, Helen. Probably I'll like her. But I don't like to see you excited and disturbed as she always makes you. Even in letters."

"Nonsense."

"No—quite true. You're not real. You begin by wondering whether you've kept up to the college standard of women again. You wonder if you've gone to seed and begin worrying about it. You get different. Even to me."

"How foolish, Gage."

Her voice was very sweet and she slipped along the seat of the car until she was pressed close beside him. He turned her face up to his.

"I don't care what the rest of the fool women do, Helen. But I do so love you when you're real—tangible—sweet."

"I'm always real, about five pounds too tangible and invariably sweet."

"You're utterly unreliable, anyway. You promised me you'd keep clear of this political stuff at least for a while. You quite agreed with me that you were not the kind

of person for it. Then along comes this Duffield woman to stir up things and you forget everything you said to me and are off in Mrs. Brownley's train."

"I'm not in anybody's train, Gage." Mrs. Flandon straightened up. "And I don't intend to be in anybody's train. But it's a different thing to show decent interest in what other women are thinking and doing. Perhaps you don't want me to read the newspapers either."

"I merely want you to be consistent. I don't want you to be one of these—"

"Fake women," supplied his wife. "You repeat yourself badly, dear."

Entering the Brownley drawing-room a few minutes after his wife, Gage found no difficulty in picking out the object of his intended dislike. She was standing beside Helen and looked at him straightly at his entrance with a level glance such as used to be the prerogative of men alone. He had only a moment to appraise her as he crossed the room. Rather prettier—well, he had been warned of that, she had carried the famous Daisy Chain in college,—cleverly dressed, like his own wife, but a trifle more eccentric perhaps in what she was wearing. Not as attractive as Helen—few women were that and they usually paled a little beside her charm. A hard line about her mouth—no, he admitted that it wasn't hard—undeveloped perhaps. About Helen's age—she looked it with a certain fairness—about thirty-one or two.

She met him with the same directness with which she had regarded him, giving him her hand with a charming smile which seemed to be deliberately purged of coquetry and not quite friendly, he felt, though that, he quickly told himself, must be the reflection of his own mood.

"And how do you find Helen?" he asked her.

"Very beautiful—very dangerous, as usual."

"Dangerous?"



"Helen is always dangerous. She uses her power without directing it."

He had a sense of relief. That was what he had been feeling for. That was the trouble with Helen. But on that thought came quickly irritation at the personal comment, at the divination of the woman he disapproved of.

"It is sometimes a relief," he said, "to find some woman who is not deliberately directing her powers."

"You make my idea crystallize into an ugly thought, Mr. Flandon. It's hardly fair."

There she was, pulling him into heavy argument. He felt that he had been awkward and that it was entirely her fault. He took refuge in the commonplaces of gallantry.

"Ugly thoughts are impossible in some company. You're quite mistaken in my meaning."

She smiled, a half amused smile which did not so much reject his compliment as show him how impervious she was to such things. Deliberately she turned to Helen who had been enveloped by the ponderous conversation of the host. Mr. Brownley liked to talk to Helen and Helen was giving him that absorbed attention which she usually gave to any man. Gage and Margaret joined them, and as if she wondered at the brevity of their initial exchange, Helen gave them a swift glance.

"Well," she said, "have the feminist and the anti-feminist found peace in each other?"

"She refuses to be complimented," grinned Gage, rather sheepishly, immensely grateful to Helen for making a joke of that momentary antagonism.

"Have women given up their liking for compliments?" Mr. Brownley beamed upon them beneficently, quite conscious of his ability to remain gallant in his own drawing-room. "Not these women surely."

Gage flushed a little. It was almost what he himself had said. It had been his tone.

"We have been given so much more than compliments, Mr. Brownley," said Margaret Duffield, "that they seem a little tasteless after stronger food."

"Not tasteless to most of us. Perhaps to a few, like Margaret. But most of us, men and women, will like them as long as we have that passion for appearing to ourselves as we would like to be and not as we are."

Over recovered ease of manner, Gage smiled at Helen. She had taken that up neatly. She had penetration, not a doubt of it. Why did she try then to subordinate herself to these other women, people like this Duffield girl, these arrogant spinsters? He greeted his hostess, who came from the library, where a group of people were already settled about the card tables.

"Will you make a fourth with the Stantons and Emily Haight, please, Gage? You like a good game and Emily can furnish it."

Mrs. Brownley was a tall, elaborately marcelled woman of about fifty. Handsome, people said, as they do say it of a woman who commands their eyes even when the sex attraction has gone. She had the ease of a woman whose social position is of long standing, the graciousness of one who has nothing to gain and the slight aggressiveness of one who has much to bestow. Gage liked her. He remembered distinctly the time of her reign as one of the "younger matrons"—he had been a boy home from college when, at thirty-five, Mrs. Brownley, successfully the mother of two children, was dominating the gayety of the city's social life. Just as now—her hair gray and marcelled, and her dancing vivacity cleverly changed into an eagerness of interest in "welfare work" or "civic activity"—she released energies more in keeping with her age.

"I'll go anywhere you want me to," he said, "I'll play checkers or casino. I'll do anything—except talk to feminist females."

"Well, Emily's surely no feminist—go along then—"

It was a very small party, a dinner of ten to which the Flandons had not been able to come because of a late afternoon meeting at Gage's office. So he and Helen had come along later, informally, to meet the guest of honor, now sitting with Helen on a divan, out of the range of the card players.

"Have you begun operations yet?" Helen was asking.

"Oh, no. It's a very vague job I have and you mustn't expect too much. I am not supposed to interfere with any local activities—just lend a hand in getting new women interested, speaking a bit, that sort of thing, rousing up women like you who ought to be something more than agreeable dilettantes."

"If I'm agreeable—" began Helen.

"I won't be put off. You write that nonsense in your letters. Why aren't you interested in all this?"

"I truly am. Very noticeably. I'm secretary to this and treasurer to that—all the women's things in town. On boards of directors—no end."

"And you care about them as much as your tone shows. Are you submerged in your husband then?"

"He'd love to hear you say that. Love you for the suspicion and hate you for the utterance. No—hardly submerged. He's a very fascinating person and I'd go almost any lengths—but hardly submerged. Where did you get the word anyway? Ultra-modern for subjugated? Gage is good to me. Lets me go and come, unchallenged—doesn't read my letters—"

"Stop being an idiot. I'm not insinuating things against Gage. What I'm trying to find out is what you are interested in."

"I'm interested in so many things I couldn't begin to tell you. Psychoanalysis—novels—penny lunches—you—Mrs. Brownley's career as a politician—my beloved babies—isn't that enough?"

"I'm not at all sure that it is enough."

"Well, then you shall find me a new job and I'll chuck the old ones. Tell me about yourself. I hardly had a chance to hear the other day. So the great Harriet Thompson sent you out to inspire the Middle West with love of the Republican party? It's hardly like you, Margaret, to be campaigning for anything so shopworn as the Republican party."

"I do that on the side. What I do primarily is to stir up people to believe in women—especially women in women."

"Then you don't believe in the G. O. P."

"I'm not a campaign speaker, Helen. I'm an organizer. Of course I think I'd rather have the Republicans in than the Democrats for certain obvious reasons but if you mean that I think the Republican candidate will be a Messiah—I don't. Gage is a Republican—how about you?"

"Half Republican—half Socialist."

"The extent of your Socialism is probably a subscription to a couple of magazines."

"About."

"You ought to focus on something, I think."

"Go on. It does me good. After years of hearing mouthing nonsense," Helen spoke with sudden heat, "of hearing people say 'How wonderful you are, Mrs. Flandon' and 'How do you manage to do so much, Mrs. Flandon?' and all sorts of blithering compliments, it's wonderful to listen to you. Though I'm not sure I could focus if I wanted to—at least for any definite period. I do, for a while, and then I swing back to being very

desperately married or extremely interested in something else. You can't put Gage in a corner like some husbands, you know, Margaret."

"I should imagine not."

"Suppose," said Mrs. Brownley, coming up to them, now that her other guests were disposed of, "that we have a little talk while the others are busy and plan our work a little. You don't really mean to carry Miss Duffield off, do you, Helen?"

"I must, Mrs. Brownley. I've been trying for years to get this young woman to visit me and, now that she is in the city, I couldn't let her stay with any one else. I didn't have any idea that she was going to be the organizer sent by the Women's Republican Committee."

"I wouldn't have been sent either, if Mrs. Thompson hadn't been dreadfully short of workers. But she was, and I know her very well and though she knows I only go with her part way, I promised to do the best I could to organize things for her and get the women interested, even if I couldn't speak in behalf of the party and its candidates. You see, Mrs. Brownley, we've done so much organization for suffrage work among women that it comes pretty naturally to us to do this other work, just as it does to you."

Mrs. Brownley nodded.

"You'll be an immense help, Miss Duffield. What I had sketchily planned was a series of small meetings in the city, lasting over a period of a couple of weeks and then a big rally of all the women. You assure yourself of your audience for the big meeting by working up the small ones."

"We must have some good speakers," said Margaret, "I am sure the National Committee will send us those from time to time."

"The heavy work will be in the country districts."

"I suppose so. The women there will have to be rounded up and we should have some women of influence from the country districts to work with us. Can you find some?"

"There are some," answered Mrs. Brownley, "who've done a good deal of club work. There's a Mrs. Ellsmith and there's a new district chairman for the Federated Clubs who seems to be a bright little woman—a Mrs. Eric Thorstad. She comes from Mohawk, about seventy miles out of the city. It's a Normal School town, quite a little center for the surrounding villages. We might write to her."

"We ought to see her," answered Margaret, "it works better. The more personal contact you get with the women now, the better. Why can't we go to Mohawk—is that what you called it?—and some of the surrounding towns and do a little rounding up?"

"We could—very easily. Mr. Brownley would let us have the Etta—that's the special car on his railroad which runs through all that country."

"I think it would be better not. That identifies us too much, if you don't mind my saying it, with the railroad. No—let's take the regular trains. And make this person come with us to do a little talking." She indicated Helen with a laugh.

"I'll come," said Helen, "of course."

She sat back, as Margaret Duffield went on talking in her deft, sure way, outlining the work to be done. It seemed to Helen that Margaret had hardly changed in eight years. She had been just like this in college, eager, competent, doing things for suffrage, talking feminism. Well, so had Helen, herself. But something had changed her point of view subtly. Was it being married, she wondered? She couldn't rouse her enthusiasms really over all this woman business any more. Was it laziness?

Was it lack of inspiration? Had she been making too many concessions to Gage's ideas? She must have Margaret at her house. She wanted to see her and Gage in action. How they would row! She laughed a little to herself, thinking of Gage. The warm little feeling crept over her that always returned as she thought of him. How foolish Margaret was to miss all that—living with a man. Suddenly she felt expanded, experienced. She wanted to do something to show that all her discontents had vanished. She had been nervous and dissatisfied since Margaret had come. Well, she had come, and Helen had measured herself up beside her, fearful of shrinkage in her own stature. What was it that to-night had reassured her, made her feel that Margaret had not really gone beyond her, that she was not really jealous of Margaret's kind of life?

The others were still talking of projected trips into the country. "Let's go then," said Helen, leaning forward, "and get them so stirred up that we leave all the old farmers gasping. Let's start a rebellion of country women. Let's get them thinking!"

Margaret stared at her.

"That sounds more like you!" she exclaimed.

"I'm full of energy," said Helen, on her feet now. "Margaret, you must come to my house within three days or I'll send a policeman for you. And now I'm going to break up Gage's bridge game."

She could break it up. Gage was immediately conscious of her. As she sat beside him, pretending quiet and interest, he could feel that she was neither quiet nor interested. He was pleased that she had broken away from the Duffield girl to come to him. He wanted to acknowledge it. To throw down his cards and put his arms about her. Since he couldn't do that he kept on thinking of it.

"You bring us bad luck, Mrs. Flandon," said Gage's partner, with a flavor of tartness.

She rose again, laying her hand lightly on her husband's shoulder.

"Driven away from the serious minded everywhere. If I go into the music room and shut the door tightly, may I play?"

That she knew would disturb Gage too. And she couldn't help disturbing him. She would play the things that held especial meanings for him and her. She would play the things which she had used to play in college for Margaret on Sunday evenings, set her by the ears too, startle her out of her seriousness as she had used to startle her. She would arouse in Margaret some of those emotions which couldn't be dead. She would find out if she had those emotions still.

Then over the first notes she forgot what she meant to do. She was alone with herself—she had forgotten the others. And because she had forgotten, the things happened to the others as she had meant them to happen. Gage, bidding deliberately to make his hand the dummy, left the card table and outside the door of the music room found Margaret, also listening. They took refuge in immediate conversation.

"So she keeps up her music," said Margaret.

"Yes. She works several hours a day. And we have an excellent teacher out here in the wilderness."

With a formal excuse, he returned to his bridge game.

## II

At midnight Mrs. Brownley broke up the bridge by summoning the players to the dining room where there were iced drinks and sandwiches. Mrs. Brownley did that sort of thing extremely well. Men used to say with



gratitude that she knew enough not to keep them up all night, and her informal buffet suppers closed the evening comfortably for them. It was a "young" crowd to-night—not young according to the standards of the débutante Brownleys but people between thirty and forty. The Stantons, whom everybody had everywhere because they were good company and perfectly fitting in any group. Emily Haight, who had become ash-blond and a little caustic with the decreasing possibilities of a good marriage but whom every one conceded had a good mind, who "read everything" and played a master hand of bridge. She had sat next to Walter Carpenter at dinner, as she inevitably was placed when they were in the same company, because they had known each other so well and long and because it seemed to be in the back of people's mind that steady propinquity ought to produce results in emotion. He was quite the person for Emily—about her age, well-to-do, popular, keen-minded. But to-night at dinner he had devoted himself almost pointedly to Margaret Duffield. They had rallied him afterwards at the card table about his sudden interest in feminism and he had smiled his self-controlled smile and let them have their joke. He had played cards with Jerrold Haynes, another of Mrs. Brownley's "intellectuals," who had written a book once, and had it published (though never another), and who managed to concoct, with the help of Helen Flandon, almost all the clever remarks which were *au courant* in their particular circle. He and Carpenter had tried to make Margaret play bridge but she had told them that she couldn't, reducing them to a three-handed game which they were ready to abandon at twelve o'clock.

Jerrold went as usual to Helen's side. There was a friendship between them which bathed in a kind of half-serious worship on his part and a bantering comrade-

ship on hers. They sat together in a corner of the long, oak-paneled dining room and made conversation about the others, conversation for the sake of clever words.

"Walter has made his way to the candle flame again. He seems to have been captured," said Jerrold.

Helen looked across the room curiously. Gage and Walter were both talking to Margaret who was standing in a little glow of electric candle light. Helen remembered that in college Margaret had done her hair that same way, in a loose knot modeled after some sculptured Psyche.

"Don't you think she is lovely?" she asked more in comment than question.

"Do you mean beautiful?"

"Well—what do you think?"

"I don't quite think of her as a woman."

"Silly stuff—"

"No, truly. Most women you sense. They either try to use their sex to allure or impress you or else they repress it for any one of a dozen reasons. She—somehow seems to lack it."

"It's not so easy as that, Jerrold, you phrase-maker. I've known her a long while and I have no idea whether she's in love, has been in love, yearns after or fights against it. You guess boldly, but probably not well."

"Maybe not. You must tell me if I am right and you find it out."

There was a sound of motors in the drive outside, then high pitched voices, and Mrs. Brownley went out into the hall.

"Isn't this early for the youngsters?" asked Gage.

They all laughed but though the conversation went on as before, an anticipation rested on them all. Against the background of the chattering voices in the hall, they seemed a little subdued, waiting.

Allison Brownley pushed her escort in. He seemed to be reluctant but she had her hands on his back and he came through the door, stumbling.

"We can come to the high brow party, can't we?" cried Allison. "Can't we have some food? We're perfectly starved and there wasn't a table to be had at the Rose Garden."

"I knew you must have been driven out of everywhere to come home this early," called Gage, "though of course young men in the banking business might benefit by somewhat earlier hours."

The young man laughed awkwardly. He was a rather pale, small young man, badly dwarfed by Gage's unusual bulk and suggesting a consciousness of it when he tried to draw Allison to the other end of the room. But she preferred Gage for the moment. She was not a pretty girl though she made that negligible. What was important about her was her vigor and her insolent youngness. Her hair was cut just below her ears and curled under in an outstanding shock and her scarlet evening dress and touches of rouge made Margaret, as she stood beside her, seem paler, older, without vigor. But she stood there only a moment, poised. Then the others, six of them, had invaded the dining room. Giggling, spurting into noisy laughter at unrevealed jokes, eating greedily, separating from the older people as if nothing in common could be conceived among them, they went to the farther end of the room, Allison with some youthfully insolent remark hurled back at Gage.

The others seemed suddenly conscious that it was midnight—the time when only extreme youth had a right to be enjoying itself. They took upon themselves the preliminary airs of departure. But Helen, separating herself from the group, went down the room to the young people.



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They had settled into chairs and began to rise a little awkwardly but she did not let them, sitting down herself on the arm of Allison's chair and bending to talk to them all. They burst into gales of laughter at something she said. Gage and Jerrold watched her from the other end of the room.

It was wonderful, thought Gage, how even beside those young faces, her beauty stood out as more brilliant. How her hair shone under those soft lights! How golden, mellow, she was in every gesture!

Jerrold, in need of some one to whom to comment, isolated Margaret.

"Watch your amazing friend," he said, "those children made us feel old and stiff muscled. See how she is showing us that they are raw and full of angles."

"Is it important?" asked Margaret.

"I suppose not. Except that it is a time when youth seems to be pretty securely on the throne of things. And I like to see it get a jolt."

### III

All the way home, Gage had wanted to say something to his wife, something in appreciation of her beauty, something to still somehow the desire to express his love. As they stood for a moment in their hallway he sought for but could not find the words. There was in him a conflicting, a very definite enmity to her consciousness of her powers. He did not want to increase it. It seemed to him that to have her know her charm meant that she would lose it. He had seen her lose it so. When he felt that she was deliberate—

"You were very charming to-night, dearest."

"The first duty of a woman," she laughed, "is to be charming, if she can."

There it was. She had set him back. He felt it cruelly. Why hadn't she simply turned and thanked him, given him the caress he was waiting for? Why had she made it all what he suspected? She had planned every move. Probably planning now—he became stubborn, thwarted, angry.

"I didn't care much for your friend," he said, lighting his cigarette.

"No? But you won't mind my having her here."

"Well, as you know, I'd much prefer not. I don't think that sort of woman a healthy influence."

"And yet you know, Gage, I might be getting a little tired of merely healthy influences. The change might set me up."

She too was strangely angry. She had been thrilled all evening by the thought of this home-coming. She had been saving up emotions to throw her into Gage's arms. She wanted to feel—to tell him she loved him. He was making it impossible.

They stood there, longing for each other, yet on guard mentally, afraid of the other's thrust, the other's mockery.

"Of course I can't refuse to let you have any friend of yours here at the house. Only if she comes, I do wish you'd excuse me as much as possible. I do not want to be rude and I certainly shall be if she involves me in these feminist arguments."

"I don't believe Margaret would argue with you, Gage." She said it lightly, her insinuation that he was beyond the pale of argument flicking him with a little sting.

"Possibly not. However, I should not care to waste her time. And as I said to you to-night I don't like her effect on you."

"I am not particularly under her influence, Gage. I have my own ideas. What you probably mean is that

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you object to my doing the things which are interesting women all over the world."

"When have I ever objected to anything you've done?"

"I've done nothing, have I? Been secretary to a few small town clubs. Kept house. Tended my babies. That's all I've done except play the piano."

"Did that dissatisfy you as much as your tone implies?"

"It's not enough to satisfy women now."

He shrugged.

"Well—do anything you please, my dear. I certainly won't stop you if you run for office."

She was very cold.

"You're sneering at me, Gage."

He tossed away his cigarette and came up to her where she stood, still muffled in the cloak she had worn. She was fast in his embrace and it gave her the moment of relief she had sought. She closed her eyes and lay relaxed against his shoulder. And then came the creeping little fear. He had managed her like that. He couldn't respect her.

"Darling Helen—"

Her thought spoke.

"Margaret would never have let herself go off the point like this—"

"Oh, damn Margaret!" said Gage, letting her go, angrily.

Helen looked at him in disgust and went upstairs.

It wasn't, thought Gage, pacing up and down the living room, as if he were a reactionary. Helen knew that. He had no objection to women doing anything. He'd said so. He'd shown it. He'd put women on his local Republican committee. And sized them up pretty well too, he told himself. They worked well enough on certain things. Some of them had good minds. But

the issue with him and Helen had nothing to do with granting women a concession here and there. That was all right. The trouble was with this woman, these women who made Helen so restless, so unsettled for no particular reason, with no particular object. He hated, as he had said, the self-consciousness of it all. He hated this self-conscious talk, this delving into emotions, this analysis of psychical states and actions, this setting of sex against sex. It ate into emotions. It had made women like that Margaret. He measured his dislike of her, bitterly. Even on their wedding trip she had interfered. He remembered the first flagging in Helen's abandonment to her love for him. That letter from Margaret, outwardly kind, he felt, outwardly all right, but suggesting things had brought it about. Helen had shown it to him.

"She's afraid we'll become commonplace married people," she said, "but we won't, will we?"

There, at the start, it had begun. Discussion when there should have been no discussion—feelings pried into. How he hated college women. It should be prohibited somehow—these girls getting together and talking about things. Forming these alliances. All along the line, for six years, and this was the first time he'd even met her, this Margaret had been held up to him. Margaret's letters had come and with each of them would sweep over Helen that fear that she was becoming dull—sliding backward—those little reactions against him—those pull-backs. At the time Bennett was born the same thing had happened. First the natural beauty, then that fear of being swept under by "domesticity." The way they used the word as if it were a shame, a disgrace. He felt he had never told Helen the half he felt about these things. And now that rotten oath had put him in the wrong. He'd have to apologize. He'd have to begin

with an apology and there he would be put in the entire wrong again. It wasn't as if women didn't have to be handled like children anyhow. They did. What could you do with them when they got into moods except coax them out of it? There was Helen upstairs now, probably hating him—wishing she were free—envying that spinster friend of hers.

His thoughts took a sudden turn. She couldn't quite wish that. Surely she didn't want not to be married to him. She'd never said anything like that. He didn't really think she had ever for a minute wished it. She was crazy about Bennett and Peggy. She loved him too.

On that thought he went upstairs, his apology on his lips, his mind tangled, but his need of peace with Helen very great.



## CHAPTER II

### FREDA

FREDA met her father on the street three blocks from home. She saw him coming, laden as usual with books, a package of papers from the psychology class to correct—and the meat. The collar of his ulster was turned up around his ears but Freda knew him even in the gathering twilight, a block away. There was a dependency about Eric Thorstad's figure—about the meat—that was part of her life.

"Liver or veal?" she asked gayly, taking the fat package from under his arm.

"It's a secret."

"Sausage," she said, "I can tell by the feel and the smell."

"Aren't you late, Freda?"

"I went to the movies."

"Again? I wish you wouldn't go so often. What do you get out of them?"

"Thrills, father dear."

"All unreal."

She skipped into a stride that matched his.

"A thrill is a shiver of romance," she declared, "it's never unreal."

"And what gives the shiver? The white sheet?"

"I'm open minded. Could be a well tailored garden, Nazimova's gown, a murder on a mountain."

He laughed and they went along briskly until they came to the third in a row of small yellow frame houses,

and turned in at the scrap of cement walk which led up to the porch.

In the kitchen Mrs. Thorstad turned from the stove to kiss them both.

"How was your meeting?" asked her husband.

A kind of glow came over Adeline Thorstad's face.

"It was a lovely meeting. I am sure that it is significant that so many women, even women like old Mrs. Reece will come to hear a talk on their civic responsibilities. You should have managed to come, Freda."

Freda put an arm about her mother's shoulders.

"I couldn't," she said. "I'd have spoiled the circle of thought. I don't care whether women vote or not."

She was six inches taller than her mother's neat prettiness and at first glance not nearly so attractive. Her rather coarse hair was too thick and pulled back into a loose low knot and her features were heavier than those of her mother's, her skin less delicate. The neat pyramid of her mother's blond hair, her smooth, fair skin were almost as they had been fifteen years before. But Freda showed more promise for fifteen years hence. Her hair shaded from yellow to orange red, her eyes were deep blue and her loose-hung, badly managed figure showed a broad gracefulness that her mother's lacked.

She had somehow taken the little qualities of her mother's prettiness and made them grander, so that she seemed to have been modeled from an imperfect idea rather than a standard type. In her father was the largeness of build which might have accounted for her, though not too obviously for Mr. Thorstad stooped a little and days in the classroom had drained his face of much natural color. Still he had carried over from some ancestor a suggestion of power which he and his daughter shared.

"Don't talk like that, Freda. It's so reactionary. Women nowadays—"

"I know. But I don't especially approve of women nowadays," teased Freda. "I think that maybe we were a lot more interesting or delightful or romantic as we were when we didn't pretend to have brains."

But her mother ignored her.

"Don't talk nonsense," she said. "Set the table and then I must tell you my news."

They were used to news from Mrs. Thorstad. She was full of the indomitable energy that created little events and situations and exulted in them. Victories in the intrigues of the district federated clubs, small entanglements, intricate machinations were common-places to her husband and daughter since Mrs. Thorstad had become district vice-president.

So now when the sausage, flanked by its mound of mashed potatoes, came sizzling to the table and Freda had satisfied her soul by putting three sprays of red marshberries in a dull green bowl in the middle, they looked forward to dinner with more anticipation than to Mrs. Thorstad's surprise. But she began impressively, and without delay.

"I think that this entrance of women into politics may alter the whole course of our lives."

Freda and her father exchanged a whimsical friendly glance in which no disrespect blended.

"No doubt," said Mr. Thorstad.

"If I were called to public office, think what a difference it would make!"

"What difference?" asked Freda.

"Why—there'd be more money, more chances to better ourselves."

Her husband seemed to shrink at the cheaply aspiring

phrase, then looked at her with something like the patience of one who refuses to be hurt.

"So now you want to be the breadwinner too, my dear?"

Perhaps she took that for jocosity. She did not answer directly.

"I met Mrs. Brownley—the Mrs. Brownley—at a meeting not long ago. She said she thought there would be a future for me."

"No doubt," said her husband, again.

He gazed into the sausage platter reflectively.

Twenty years ago, he might have remembered, Adeline Miller had thought there was a future for him. She had intended to better herself through him. She was teaching then in a little town and he was county superintendent. They had met and been attracted and after a little she had condoned the fact of his Swedish name and of the two parents who spoke no English. She had exchanged the name of Miller for Thorstad, soberly, definitely determined to better herself and profit by the change.

Then there came Freda. Freda, who had stimulated them both as healthy promising babies are likely to stimulate their parents. Thorstad had become a High School instructor, then had left that position after eight years to come as assistant to the professor of psychology in the Mohawk State Normal School, at a slightly lower salary, but "bettering himself." Ten years ago, that was. He was head of his department now—at three thousand a year. It was his natural height and he had attained it—not a prospector in his work, but a good instructor always. It had taken much labor to have come so far, nights of study, summers spent in boarding houses near the University that he might get his degrees. And Adeline had gone along her own path. During all these

years in Mohawk she had been busy too. First with little literary clubs, later with civic councils, state federations, all the intricate machinery of woman's clubdom.

She had her rewards. Federation meetings in the cities, little speeches which she made with increasing skill. She had been "speaking" for a long time now. During the war she fortified her position with volunteer speaking for Liberty Loans, War Saving Stamps. All this in the name of "bettering others." All this with that guiding impulse to "better herself."

Her husband made no demands on her time which interfered with any public work. If it was necessary he could cook his own meals, make his own bed, even do his own washing, and there had been times when he had done all this for himself and Freda. Not that Mrs. Thorstad ever neglected her family. The Family, like Democracy and the Cradle, were three strong talking points always. She was a fair cook and a good housekeeper, a little mechanical in her routine but always adequate. And when she was away she always left a batch of bread and doughnuts and cookies. It was never hard on Eric and he, unlike some men, was handy around the house. He was handy with Freda too from the time he dressed her as a baby until now. Now he was handy with her moods, with her incomprehensible unwillingness to better herself by sharing in her mother's plans.

Leaning a little toward her mother now, Freda brought the conversation off generalities.

"But the news? We are all agog."

"The news is that we are to have distinguished guests on Thursday. Mrs. Brownley, Mrs. Gage Flandon, and Miss Margaret Duffield of New York are making a tour of the country and they are to stop here for a day. I am to arrange everything for them. There is no telling to what it may lead."

"They're coming here?" Freda's tone was disgusted. "A lot of women spellbinders. Oh, Lord, save us. I'm going camping."

"It is a great privilege," said her mother, with a tight little motion of her lips. "I shall need you, Freda."

## CHAPTER III

### ON THE STUMP

#### I

**S**T. PIERRE was the big city of the state. Around it a host of little towns, farming, manufacturing, farther away even mining, made it their center and paid it tribute by mail-order and otherwise. It was one of the Middle West cities at which every big theatrical star, every big musical "attraction," every well booked lecturer spent at least one night. It boasted branch establishments of exclusive New York and Chicago shops. It had its paragraph in the marriage, birth and death section in *Vogue*. Altogether it was not at all to be ignored.

Harriet Thompson had known what she was doing when she sent Margaret Duffield West to organize the women of the St. Pierre section in groups which could be manipulated for the Republican party.

Margaret stayed with Mrs. Brownley for a few days and then spent a week with Helen, during which time she found a pleasant room and bath which she leased by the month, and to which she insisted on going.

Helen's remonstrances had no effect.

"You're foolish to think of such a thing as my camping on you. Why I may be here for several months. No, I couldn't. Besides we'll have a really better time if we don't have to be guesting each other. And I get a reasonable amount for expenses which really needn't be added on to your grocery bill. Gage has party expense enough."

Gage was very cordial, particularly as he saw that her visit was not to be indefinite. It hurried him perhaps into greater gallantry than he might have otherwise shown. He did everything to be the obliging host and to his surprise enjoyed himself immensely. Margaret was more than a good talker. She gave him inside talk on some things that had happened in Washington. She could discuss politicians with him. No one spoke of the deteriorating influences of marriage and the home on women. Margaret was delightful with the children. She did not hint at a desire to see him psychoanalyzed. He found himself rather more coöperative than antagonistic and on the day of Margaret's definite removal to her new room he was even sorry.

Helen found the new room most attractive. It was a one-room and bath apartment, so-called, furnished rather badly but with a great deal of air and light.

"It feels like college," she said, sinking down on a cretonne covered couch bed. "Atrocious furniture but so delightfully independent. What fun it must be to feel so solidly on your own, Margaret."

"Not always fun, but satisfying," said Margaret, making a few passes at straightening furniture.

Helen sighed faintly and then lost the sigh in a little laugh.

"I'm actually afraid to ask you some things," she admitted, "I'm afraid of what you'll say. Would you really sooner not be married?"

"I think so. Emotional moments of course. On the whole I think I'd rather not be."

"But you didn't always feel that way."

"No—not six years ago."

"Then was there a man you wanted?"

"There were several men. But I didn't want them hard enough or they didn't want me simultaneously."



"Where are they now?"

"God knows—quarreling with their wives, perhaps."

"And you don't care?"

"Truly—not a bit." Margaret's eyes were level and quite frank. "It's all dreadful nonsense, this magazine story stuff about the spinsters with their secret yearnings covered up all the time. I'm going to do something to prick that bubble before I die. Of course the conceit of married people is endless but at least spinsters have a right to as much dignity as bachelors."

"All right," said Helen, "I'll respect you. I know I'm going home and that you aren't following me with wistful eyes wishing you could caress my babies. Is that it? You comb your hair without a qualm and go down to dinner."

"Exactly. Only before you go I want you to promise to go with us on this trip to the country towns. We'll be gone three days only. Gage can spare you."

"I don't quite see what use I'd be."

"I do. I want you to talk to them and charm them. I can organize. Mrs. Brownley can give them Republican gospel. What I want you to do is to give them a little of the charm of being a Republican. Borrow some of Gage's arguments and use your own manner in giving them and the result will be what I want."

"Don't I seem rather superfluous?"

"We couldn't do it without you. Mrs. Brownley for name—you for charm—and I'll do the rest of the work."

Helen looked at her watch.

"Gage will beat me," she declared, "I'm late for dinner again."

## II

The train bumped along for several hours. Mrs. Brownley read, her book adjusted at a proper distance



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from her leveled eye-glasses. Helen and Margaret fell into one of those interminable conversations on what was worth while a woman's doing. They were unexcited, but at Mohawk, Mrs. Thorstad arrived thirty minutes early at the railroad station, with Mrs. Watson's car, which she had commandeered. Mrs. Watson had also offered lunch but at the last minute her Hilda had become sick and thrown her into such confusion that Mrs. Thorstad, brightly rising to the occasion, had taken lunch upon herself and even now Freda was putting a pan of scalloped potatoes into the oven and anxiously testing the baking ham.

It had fallen naturally to Mrs. Thorstad to arrange the meeting in Mohawk, Mrs. Brownley writing her that she need not consider it a partisan meeting, that its object was merely educative, to explain to the women what the Republican party meant. And Mrs. Thorstad had few scruples about using her influence to get as large a group together for the meeting as she could. To have these three celebrities for a whole day had been a matter of absorbing thought to her. They were to have a luncheon at her home, then to have an afternoon meeting at the Library and a further meeting in the evening. Mrs. Thorstad knew she could get a crowd out. She always could.

Freda had not minded getting lunch. She didn't mind cooking, especially when they could lay themselves out in expense as was considered proper to-day. But she hated meeting these strange, serious-minded women. She had looked in the glass at herself and decided several times that she was altogether out of place. She had tried to bribe her mother into pretending she was a servant. But that was in vain. So Freda had put on the black taffeta dress which she had made from a Vogue pattern and was hoping they had missed their train.

Coming to the kitchen door her mother called her and she went in reluctantly. Then she saw Helen and her face lit up with interest. Her mother had said Mrs. Flandon was nice looking but she had pictured some earnest looking youngish woman. This—this picture of soft gray fur and dull gold hair! She was like a magazine cover. She was what Freda had thought existed but what she couldn't prove. And it was proven.

Speeding on the heels of her delight came shyness. She shook hands awkwardly, trying to back out immediately. But Helen did not let her go at once.

"We are a lot of trouble, I'm afraid, Miss Thorstad."

"Oh, no you're not. It's not a bit of trouble. I'll have lunch ready soon, but it will be very simple," said Freda.

Her voice, thought Freda, is like her clothes. It's luxurious.

The lunch was ready soon and to the visitors it was very pleasant as they went into the little dining-room. It was so small that the chairs on one side had to be careful not to back up against the sideboard. The rug was worn to thinness but the straight curtains at the windows, which did not shut out the sun, were daffodil yellow and on the table the little pottery bowl with three blossoming daffodils picked out the same note of defiant sunlight again. Helen looked around her appreciatively.

Freda served them quietly, slipping into her own chair, nearest the door to the kitchen, only after the dishes were all in place and every one eating. She took her own plate from her mother absently. The others were talking. She listened to them, the throaty, assured voice of Mrs. Brownley, Miss Duffield's clear, definite tones and the voice of Mrs. Flandon, with a note of laughter in it always, as if she mocked at the things she said. Yet always with light laughter.

"Are you interested in all this political business?" asked Mrs. Flandon of her, suddenly.

"No," said Freda, "Not especially. But mother is, so I hear a great deal of it."

Her mother laughed a little reprovingly.

"Freda has been too busy to give these things time and thought."

"How are you busy? At home?"

She let her mother answer that.

"Freda graduated from the Normal last year. We hoped there would be a teaching opening here for her but as there wasn't, we persuaded her to stay home with us and take a little special work at the Normal."

Helen kept her eyes on the girl's face. Keenly sensitive to beauty as she was, she had felt that it was the girl rather than the mother who created the atmosphere of this house with which she felt in sympathy. She wanted to talk to her. As the meal progressed she kept her talking, drew her out little by little, and confidence began to come back to Freda's face and frankness to her tongue.

"She's beautiful," thought Helen, "such a stunning creature."

But it was later that she got the key to Freda.

They were in the living room and she picked up some of the books on the table. They interested her. It was a kind of reading which showed some taste and contemporary interest. There was the last thin little gray-brown "Poetry," there was "The Tree of Heaven," "Miss Lulu Bett," Louis Untermeyer's poems. Those must be Freda's. There was also what you might expect of Mrs. Thorstad. Side by side lay the "Education of Henry Adams" and "The Economic Consequences of the Peace."

"Of course the mother reads those," thought Helen, "after she's sure they're so much discussed that they're

not dangerous any longer. But the mother never reads 'Poetry.'"

"Your daughter likes poetry?" she asked Mrs. Thorstad.

"She reads a great deal of it. I wish I could make her like more solid things. But of course she's young."

Mrs. Flandon went out to the kitchen where Freda was vigorously clearing up.

"You're doing all the work," she protested.

"Very sketchily," confessed Freda, "I can cook better than I clear up, mother tells me."

"That may be a virtue," said Helen. She stood leaning against the door, watching Freda.

"Who reads poetry with you?"

"Father—sometimes. Oh, you mustn't think because you see some things I'm reading that I'm that sort. I'm not at all. I'm really not clever especially. I just like things. All kinds of things."

"But what kinds?"

"Just so they are alive, that's all I care. So I scatter—awfully. I can't get very much worked up about women in politics. It seems to me as if women were wasting a lot of time sometimes."

"You are like me—a natural born dilettante."

"Are you that?" asked Freda. Her shyness had gone. Here was some one to whom she could talk.

"I'm afraid I am. I like things just as you do—if they're alive. It's a bad way to be. It's hard to concentrate because some new beautiful thing or emotion keeps dragging you off and destroys your continuity. And in this world of earnest women—"

"You criticize yourself. You feel that you don't measure up to the women who do things. I know. But don't you think, Mrs. Flandon, that something's being lost somewhere? Aren't women losing—oh, the quality

that made poets write such things about them—I don't know, it's partly physical—they aren't relaxed—"

She stood, pouring her words out in unfinished phrases as if trying desperately to make a confession or ask her questions before anything interrupted, her face lit up with eagerness, its fine, unfinished beauty diffused with half-felt desires. As she stopped, Helen let her stop, only nodding.

"I know what you mean. You're right. It's all mixed up. It's what is puzzling the men too. We must talk, my dear."

Helen was quite honest about that. She meant to talk with Freda. But there was no time that afternoon. In the Library club-room, crowded with women who had come at Mrs. Thorstad's bidding for a "fresh inspiration," Helen found her hands full. She gave her talk, toning it up a bit because she saw that Freda was expecting things of her and so wandering off the point a little. But the charm that Margaret wanted was in action and Margaret, quickly sensing the possibilities of Mrs. Thorstad's town, settled down to some thorough organization work.

It was after the meeting that night that Helen saw Freda again. And then not in the hall. She had noticed the girl slip out after her own talk, as Mrs. Brownley rose to "address" the meeting, and wondered where she was going. To her discomfiture she had found that she was billeted on Mrs. Watson for the night as befitted their respective social dignities, and that Margaret was to spend the night at the Thorstad house.

But it was from Mrs. Watson's spare room window that she saw Freda.

The skating rink, a square of land, flooded with water and frozen, lay below. As she went to pull down the shade in her bed-room window—she had escaped from

Mrs. Watson as promptly as possible—Helen's eyes fell on the skaters, skimming swiftly about under arc lights which, flickering bright and then dim, made the scene beautiful. And then she saw Freda. She was wearing the red tam-o'-shanter which Mrs. Flandon had already seen and a short red mackinaw and as she flashed past under the light, it was unmistakably she—not alone. There was a young man with her.

Helen watched her come and go, hands crossed with her partner, watched the swing of her graceful body as it swayed so easily towards the man's and was in perfect tune with it.

"That's one way you get the alive and beautiful, is it?" thought Helen.

Then, after a little, by some signal, the rink was declared closed. The skaters, at the sides of the rink, sat on little benches and took off their skates. The young man knelt beside Freda and loosened the straps, a pretty bit of gallantry in the moonlight.

He had her arm. They were going home, walking a little more close to each other than was necessary, looking up, bending down. Helen could almost feel what they were feeling, excitement, vigor, intimacy. A little shiver went over her as she pulled down the shade at last and looked around at the walls with their brown scrolls and mottoed injunction to

"Sleep sweetly in this quiet room,  
Oh, thou, whoe'er thou art."



## CHAPTER IV.

### CITY MICE

#### I

**T**HE dismay of the young Brownleys was as great as that of Freda. But their indomitable mothers won.

"But, mother," cried Allison Brownley, "you don't mean you'd ask that—that little Swede girl here to the house? For a month? Why, I should think you'd see how impossible that is. We can't treat her as a servant, can we?"

"No," said Mrs. Brownley, "you can't—not at all. She's a very clever girl—Normal School graduate."

Allison sank on a divan, her short skirts shorter than ever in her abandonment, her face a picture of horrified dismay.

"Normal School—you know what they are! Pimples and plaid skirts two inches from the ground,—China silk white waists. Oh, mother dear, it's very sweet of you to think of her, but it couldn't be done. What would we do with her? Why, the days are just full! All kinds of things planned now, that Easter's over. We couldn't take her about, and we couldn't leave her at home. The Brownley girls and their little Swede friend! Mother, I *do* think you ought to keep politics out of the home."

Barbara joined in now. That was always her policy. To let Allie state the case and get excited over it and then to go after her mother reasonably if her mother didn't



give in. She was a more languorous type than Allie. "Bed-room eyes" one of the boys had said, at the height of his puppy wit.

"If you had to ask them, mother, Lent would have been the time. It just can't be managed now. As a matter of fact I've practically asked Delia Underwood to spend three weeks here." That was a lie and she knew her mother would know it, but it gave her mother a graceful way out of the difficulty.

But unfortunately Mrs. Brownley did not seem to be looking for loop-holes. She sat serenely at her desk, her eye-glasses poised upon the bills she was auditing.

"I think you will like Miss Thorstad," she answered, ignoring all the protests. "You see it's really quite important for me to have her here. The mother is a very clever little woman and with a possible political future. Miss Duffield thinks very highly of her. While we are doing this active campaign work she will be invaluable here in the city. She's a good organizer—and she's a plain woman. She can handle plain women, Miss Duffield insists, better than we can. I wish you girls would understand that there is a great deal involved in this campaign. If we stand well out here it will be important for the district—in Washington."

"Yes, mother—but why the daughter?"

"For the simple reason that Mrs. Thorstad said she didn't like to leave her at home alone. It put me in the position of having to ask her. She is, as I remember, a pretty well-appearing girl. Mrs. Flandon, whom you admire so much, Allie, was immensely taken with her. At any rate, they have been asked, they will accept and they arrive next week."

Allie looked dark.

"Well, mother," she said, with a fair imitation of her mother's tone, "if you expect me to give up everything



for the sake of this little Swede, you're mistaken. The men will just howl when they see her."

"Cheer up, Allie," said Barbara, "they may fall in love with her. Brunhilde, you know—and all of that. I think it's a shame, mother."

The girls looked at each other. They weren't ordinarily allies, but this mess was one they both would have to worry over. Their mother rose.

"Of course, girls," she said, "it is an inconvenience. But it's a good thing to do. It means more than you may guess. Be nice to Miss Thorstad and you'll not be sorry. It might mean that platinum bracelet for you, Barbara, and for Allie—"

"Mother," exclaimed Allie, "if I'm an angel to your little Swede would you let me have a new runabout—a Pierce, painted any color I like?"

Her mother merely smiled at her but Allie knew her claim was good. She turned to her sister as her mother left the room.

"She's going to do it, Bobbie, and we might just as well get something out of it, I'll tell the girls I'm getting my new car that way and they'll all help. We'll give little Miss Olson the time of her life."

"You get more out of it than I do, I notice." Barbara was inspecting herself in the mirror of her vanity case from which she allowed nothing except sleep to separate her.

"That's all right, Bob. I'll do most of the heavy work, I'll bet."

"I shan't be able to do much, I'll tell you that. Miss Burns wants me for fittings every day next week and I've a lot of dates, for evenings."

"Ted's giving you quite a rush, isn't he darling? Do you think he's landed this time or is it just that it's your turn?"

Barbara did not blush. She looked straight at her sister, her slim face disgusted.

"Pretty raw, aren't you? As a matter of fact I think he could be landed if I had the slightest desire to do it. I'm not at all sure that I want him."

Allie grinned.

"That's all right. That's what they all say, all the ones he gives a rush and leaves lamenting. I am sort of surprised that you'd fall for him so hard. Even if he is the ideal lover, every one who isn't cross-eyed knows how he does it. I'd like a little more originality, myself."

"I tell you this, Allie. That man has been misunderstood. Because he's so rich and good looking every one's chased after him and then when he was decently civil they've taken advantage of him by spreading stories about his flirtations. He's told me some things about girls—"

"Dirty cad," said Allie, cheerfully.

"All right, if you want to be insulting, I won't talk to you."

"Well, tell me what he said. I won't think about his being a dirty cad until afterwards."

What humor there was was lost on Barbara.

"I don't care to talk any more about him."

Barbara looked at her watch to conclude matters.

"And by the way, Allie, mother said I could use the limousine. I've got a lot of things to do and I'll need Chester all afternoon. Mrs. Watts is taking mother to the Morley reception and I'm calling for her. She said you could have the electric."

"My God!" said Allie. "Why doesn't she offer me a hearse? Thanks, I'd sooner take old 1898 out again. And think about that Pierce I'm going to earn."

She was out of the room in a minute, flying up the stairs, some grotesque words to a dance tune floating behind her. The Packard runabout, "old 1898," was



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humming down the garage drive half an hour later. Stopping at two houses impressive as her own, she regaled the girls who were her friends with accounts of the "Swedish invasion." It was a good story, especially with the promise of the reward tacked on the end.

### II

But it was three days before Freda had capitulated. Her first reaction had been an angry shame at her mother's inclusion of her in her own invitation. She had simply flatly refused to go. A little later it was possible to regard the business with some humor, and the shame had lost its sting. She had never known those people anyhow—never would know them—it didn't matter what they thought. When she saw that the matter was not ended and sensed the depth of determination in her mother's mind that her daughter should go with her to the Brownley's she tried to be more definite even than before in her refusal. Her mother did not seem to hear her. She insisted on keeping the subject open, never admitting for a minute that it was or could be closed. She dwelt endlessly on the advantages of the visit—on the fact that the chance for Freda had come at last.

"Chance!" stormed Freda, "why it isn't a chance to do anything except sponge on a few rich people whom I've never seen before in my life. You don't really suppose, mother, that I'd go down there and let those Brownley girls make my life miserable. You don't seem to realize, mother, that those two Brownleys are a very gay lot. They must be about my age—the older one anyway. Why, I wouldn't think of it. What on earth would I do? What on earth would I wear? What would I say? What on earth would I be there anyhow? I'm no politician. I'm not helping Mrs. Brownley strengthen

her fences or anything. If you ask me, mother, I wouldn't think of going if I were you. Don't you know she's just making a play to the gallery by having you? Probably bragging about her great sense of democracy! Why, mother!"

"You don't seem to realize,"—Mrs. Thorstad always began that way by assuming that you had missed her point, a point which was and always would be in accord with Right Living and Democracy and the Family and the Home, "that these social distinctions are of no value in my estimation. In this great country—"

Freda led her mother away from the brink of oratory.

"Look here," she said, "if they aren't a lot more important than we are—if you don't think they are—what is this wonderful chance you are talking about?"

Just at what point Freda gave in, just at what point she felt that the possibilities of her trip outweighed its impossibilities she did not know. It was certain that the young Brownleys gave way to no noisier public mockery of the proposed visit than did Freda. She was even a little shrill. She told everybody how she "hated it," how she was going along to the homes of the idle rich to chaperon her mother, that she was "breaking into high society," that she was gathering material for a book on "how the other half lives," that she would probably be mistaken for a housemaid and asked to dust the bedrooms, that mother was trying to "marry her off," that she "didn't have an idea what to wear." She talked to almost every one she met, somewhat unnecessarily, somewhat defiantly, as if determined to let any one know about her reasons for going, as if defending herself against any accusations concerning her motive in making such a visit, perhaps making sure that no later discomfiture on her own part could be made more severe by any suspicion of pleasurable anticipation.

She planned her clothes for St. Pierre with mocking but intense deliberation. A dark blue tricotine dress—she bought that at the ladies' specialty shop and taking it home ripped off all the trimming substituting the flattest and darkest of braid. That was safe, she knew. She might not be startling but she would be inoffensive, she told her mother. There was a dress made by Miss Peterson, who sewed by the day, from a remnant of bronze georgette, and half shamefacedly Freda came home one night with a piece of flame colored satin and made it herself into a gown which hung from the shoulders very straightly and was caught at the waist with silver cord (from the drapery department). And there was an evening dress at which Freda scoffed but she and Miss Peterson spent some fascinated hours over it, making pale green taffetas and tulle fit her lovely shoulders.

"Though what I'm getting these clothes for is a mystery to me," grumbled Freda. "They probably won't even ask me to go out. Probably suggest that I eat with the servants."

Yet she tried on the evening dress in the privacy of her room parading before her bureau mirror, which could not be induced to show both halves of her at once. And as she looked in the glass there came back the reflection of a girl a little flushed, excited, eager, as if in spite of all her mockery there was a dream that she would conquer unknown people and things—a hope that wonders were about to happen.

Never was there a trace of that before her mother. Having agreed to go, Freda was, on the whole, complaisant, but on principle unenthusiastic.

Her father gave her two hundred dollars the night before she went away. Mrs. Thorstad was at a neighbor's house and the gift was made in her absence without comment on that fact. Freda, whose idea of a sizable

check for her spending money was five dollars and of an exceptionally large one, ten, gasped.

"But what do I need this for?"

"You'll find ways, my dear. It's—for some of the little things which these other young ladies may have and you may lack. To put you at ease."

"Yes, but it's too much, father dear. For three or four weeks. You can't possibly afford it."

"Oh, yes, my dear. Only try to be happy, won't you? Remember that it's always worth while to learn and that there are very few people in the world who aren't friendly by nature."

That thought carried Freda through the next twenty-four hours, beginning with worry when she got on the train as to whether they were expecting her after all, through a flurry of excitement at the sense of "city" in St. Pierre, the luxury of the limousine which had been sent to meet them, through the embarrassment of hearing her mother begin to orate in a mild fashion on the beauty of Mrs. Brownley's home and the "real home spirit" which she felt in it. Freda felt sure that such conversation was not only out of place but bad taste anyway. She was divided between a desire to carry the visit off properly, showing the Brownleys that she was not gauche and stupid, and an impulse to stalk through the days coldly, showing her disdain for mere material things and the impossibility of impressing her. Yet the deep softness of the hall rugs, the broad noiseless stair carpets, the glimpses through doorways into long quiet rooms seemingly full of softly upholstered furniture, lamps with wonderfully colored shades, pictures which had deep rich colors like the colors in the rugs, made her eyes shine, her color heighten.

Mrs. Brownley met them at the house and took them to their rooms herself. Mrs. Thorstad had a big pleasant

room in a wing of the house given up to guest chambers and Freda's was a small one connected with it.

"My daughters are looking forward so much to meeting you," Mrs. Brownley said easily to Freda. "They are out just now, but when you come down for dinner they will be home. We usually dine at seven, Mrs. Thorstad. It isn't at all necessary to dress."

"She is nice, isn't she?" said Freda, as the door closed after their hostess, "maybe it won't be so bad. Anyway, all experience is good. Glad I remember that much Nietzsche. It often helps."

Mrs. Thorstad put her trim little hat on the closet shelf and began to unpack her suit-case. Freda explored the bath.

"It's like a movie," she came back to say, "I feel just like the second reel when the heroine is seduced by luxury into giving herself—"

"Freda!"

"Truly I do. She always takes a look into the closet at rows of clothes and closes the door virtuously, gazes rapturously at the chaise longue all lumpy with pillows and stiffens herself. But she never can resist the look into the bath room—monogramed towels, scented soap, bath salts. I know just exactly how the poor girls feel. Certain kinds of baths are for cleanliness—others make a lady out of a sow's ear—you know."

"Why are you wearing that dress?" asked her mother, rousing from her nap fifteen minutes later. "I was going down in my waist and skirt."

"Mother—you can't. That wasn't what she meant by not dressing. She meant not evening dress. You'll have to put on your blue silk."

"I wanted to save that for afternoon affairs."

"You won't wear it out to-night. Come, mother, I'll hook you up."



They were down at five minutes before seven. Barbara was not visible but Allie and her mother and father waited for them in the drawing-room. Crossing the threshold of that room seemed to take all Freda's courage. If her mother had not been so absorbed in thinking of the way she meant to interest Mr. Brownley in her career, she would have heard the quick little catch of breath in Freda's throat as she came through the velvet curtains behind her. She did see the quickened interest on Allie's face and Mrs. Brownley's measured glance of approval at Freda. Freda had been right. The Brownleys were dressed for dinner, quite elaborately it seemed to her. She made no note of the discrimination in evening clothes, that Mrs. Brownley's velvet dress was high at the neck and Mr. Brownley's tie black instead of white. Allie came forward with her rough and tumble welcome, shaking hands casually with Mrs. Thorstad and frankly admiring Freda. Allie herself had dressed in a hurry and was noticeable chiefly for the high spots of rouge on each cheek.

"Sorry I wasn't home when you came. I had to go to a luncheon and then to the theater. Couldn't get out of it. It was a party for a friend of mine who is to be married and I'm in the bridal party, you see. She's an awfully nice girl—marrying the most awful lemon you ever saw."

Freda knew all about that marriage. It had been heralded even in Mohawk. Gratia Allen and Peter Ward. But she gave no sign of knowing about it.

"Isn't it funny," she answered, getting Allie's note with amazing accuracy, "how often that happens? The nicest girls get the queerest men."

"Not enough decent men to go around any more."

So it was all right until Barbara came in. A little party gathered in the meantime—the Gage Flandons,

and Margaret Duffield with Walter Carpenter. Margaret was beginning to be asked as a dinner companion for Walter fairly often now. And as a concession to the young people Mrs. Brownley had asked three young men, Ted Smillie and the Bates boys, who traveled in pairs, Allie always said. They were all there when Barbara came in. Obviously she had some one, either the unknown guest or her friend Ted, in mind when she dressed, for she was perfectly done. Smoothly marcelled hair, black lace dress carrying out the latest vagaries in fashion, black slippers with jeweled buckles. As she gave her hand to Freda with the smile which held a faint hint of condescension, Freda bent her knuckles to hide the nail she had torn yesterday closing the trunk. She felt over-dressed, obvious, a splash of ugly color. Ted had been talking to her but by a simple assumption that Freda could have nothing of interest to say, Barbara took up the thread of talk with him, speaking of incidents, people that were unknown to Freda. The Bates boys were talking to Allie. Freda stood alone for a moment—an interminable awkward moment, in which no one seemed to notice her. Then Gage Flandon crossed to her side and she gave him a smile which made him her friend at once, a smile of utter gratitude without a trace of pose.

"How nice of you," she said, simply, "to come to talk to me. I feel so strange."

"My wife says you've never met any of us before. No wonder."

"It isn't just that. I'm a little afraid I'm here without much reason. Mother brought me but I'm not a political woman and I'm not"—with a rueful little glance at Barbara—"a society girl at all. I'm afraid I'll be in everybody's way."

She said it without any coquetry and it came out clearly so—as the plain little worry it was. Gage, who had

found himself a little touched by the obvious situation of the girl felt further attracted by her frankness. She seemed an unspoiled, handsome person. That was what Helen had told him, but he had grown so used to sophistication and measured innocence that he had not expected anything from the daughter of this little political speaker. He had come to size up Mrs. Thorstad, for her name had been presented as a possibility in a discussion with some of his own friends as they went over the matter of recognizing women in the political field. As Mrs. Thorstad gave her hand to him he had seen what he came to see. She had brains. She had the politician's smile. She could be used—and doubtless managed as far as was necessary. But the daughter was different. He liked that dress she was wearing. It showed her slimness, suppleness, but it didn't make her indecent like that lace thing on Bob Brownley.

"I often feel like that," he answered her, "I'm not much of a society person either and I can't keep up with these wonderful women we're seeing everywhere. Women with a lot of brains frighten me."

Idle talk, with his real, little prejudice back it, which Freda by accident uncovered immediately. She was talking against time so he would not leave her unguarded, and it was chance that she pleased him so much.

"Women have a lot of brains now," she said, "in politics and—society too, I suppose. But I wonder if we weren't more attractive when we weren't quite so brilliant. I don't mean when we had huge families and did the washing and made the butter. I mean when we were more romantic and not quite so—"

She stumbled a little. She was conscious of being historically at sea, vague in her definition of romance. But she had said that several times before and it came

easily to her tongue. She stopped, feeling awkward and then amazed at Mr. Flandon's enthusiasm.

"That's it!" he exclaimed, "that's what I miss. Women have stopped being romantic. They've done worse. They've penetrated our souls and dug out the romance and analyzed it among themselves."

But she could not answer. Some one announced dinner and Freda moved with the rest to get her first enchanted sight of the Brownley dining table with its wedgewood vases full of roses and narcissus, its shining perfection of detail.

She was near her hostess' end of the table, Mr. Flandon at her left and one of the Bates boys at her right. Mrs. Brownley had wanted to talk to Gage and had decided, as she placed the cards, that Freda would take as little of his attention as any one present. She started in after the consommé to find out what Gage thought about the Republican committee. It was most unsatisfactory for he seemed to be absorbed in telling something to Miss Thorstad and gave answers to his hostess as if his mind were on something else. As for Gage, he was talking more animatedly than he had talked to any woman in years, thought his wife, watching him.

"What heresy is my husband pouring into your ears, Miss Thorstad?" she asked, leaning forward.

Freda blushed a little as the attention turned to her.

"He is telling me the arguments I've been wanting to hear—against being a perfectly modern woman."

*overlup* "Proselytizing!" said Margaret. "Wait a bit, Miss Thorstad. Let me get the other ear after dinner."

"Freda likes to tease," explained her mother to their host.

Barbara looked a little disdainful, making some remark *sotto voce* to Ted. But he was not listening.

Freda had, in the rise of her spirits, given him a smile across the table, the kind of come-there smile she gave David Grant of Mohawk when she wanted to skate with him or dance with him—a smile of perfectly frank allure. He returned it with interest.

Helen did not follow up her remark. It had been scattered in the comments. Gage caught her eye and she gave him a look which said, "I told you there was something in that girl." Gage immediately wanted to leave the table and tell Helen all about it. But Mrs. Brownley wanted to know something again. He turned to her.

It was fairly easy for Freda after all, in spite of Barbara, whose measuring eyes made her nervous whenever they were turned on her. She had a difficult time concealing the broken finger-nail and she was not at all sure whether to lift the finger bowl off the fruit plate with the lace doily or to leave the doily. Otherwise there were no great difficulties. There was a bad moment after dinner when it became clear to her that there was some altercation among the young people which concerned her. She could not guess what it was, but she saw Allie and Barbara in heated conclave. Then, with a little toss of her head, Allie came to her.

"We thought that you and I and Fred and Tony would go down to the Majestic. We had six tickets but Bob seems to think she and Ted have another date."

And then Ted ruined things. He turned from where he and Tony Bates were smoking by the mantelpiece and strolled over to Freda.

"We're going to the Majestic—and I'm going to sit next to you," he announced.



## City Mice

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### III

The Majestic was a vaudeville house, presenting its seven acts weekly for the <sup>pleasure</sup>delectation of its patrons, servant girls, business men, impecunious <sup>boys</sup>boys in the gallery, suburbanites, shop girls with their young men, traveling men, idle people, parties of young people like the Brownley girls, one of those heterogeneous crowds that a dollar and a half price for a best seat can bring in America. When the young Brownleys arrived, the acrobatic act which led the bill was over and the two poorest comedians, put on near the beginning of the bill before the audience grew too wearily critical, were doing a buck and wing dance to the accompaniment of some quite ununderstandable words.

With a great deal of noise and mysterious laughter the late arrivals became seated finally, taking their places with the lack of consideration for the people behind them which was characteristic of their arrogance, making audible and derogatory comments about the act on the stage and curiously enough not seeming to anger any one. The girls with their fur coats, hatless, well dressed hair, the sleek dinner coated young men interested the people around them far more than they bothered them by their noisiness.

They left during the last act and before the moving picture of "Current Events," all six of them getting into the Bates' sedan and speeding at forty miles an hour out to the Roadside Inn which was kept open only until midnight.

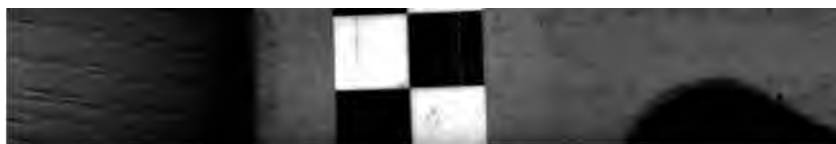
The Roadside Inn was a brown mockery of Elizabethan architecture, about thirty miles out of the city on a good road. The door opened invitingly on a long low room full of chintz-covered chairs and wicker tables and at this time of year there was always a good open fire to

welcome any comers. Back of that a dining room and, parallel with the two, a long dance room, where three enforcedly gay negroes pounded out melodies in jungle time hour after hour every evening. Upstairs there were half a dozen small bed rooms for transient automobilists who wanted to stay in the country for some reason or other or whose cars had broken down.

The place was on the fence between decency and shadowy repute. It was frequented by people of all kinds, people who were respectable and people suspected of not being so. The landlady ignored any distinctions. She had made the place into a well-paying institution, had put its decoration into the hands of a good architect with whom she always quarreled about his charges and she asked no questions if her customers paid their bills. Probably she saw no difference between those of her guests who were of one kind and those of another. They all danced in much the same manner, were equally noisy, equally critical of the extremely good food and that was as far as her contact or comment went. If the food had not been so good, the place would have suffered in patronage, but that was unfailing. The cook was ready now at five minutes' notice to concoct chicken a la king and make coffee for the Brownley party and as they came back from the dance room after having tried out the floor and the music, their supper was ready.

Freda had not acquitted herself badly there either. Without having all the tricks of the Brownleys, she had a grace and sense of rhythm which helped her to adapt herself. Besides she had the first dance with Ted. He held her close, hardly looking at her. That was his way in dancing.

"You must be very gay in Mohawk," said Barbara when they were all at the table in the dining room again.



## City Mice

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The edge of her malice was lost on Freda.

"No—not at all. Why?"

"You seem very experienced."

A little glimmer of amusement came into Freda's eyes.

"Well—not first hand experience. We read—we go to moving pictures."

"I suppose lots of people are picking up ideas from the moving pictures," Barbara commented carelessly.

One of the Bates boys was drawing something from his pocket. Barbara looked at it indifferently, Allie with a frown of annoyance.

"Didn't I tell you, Tony, to cut that stuff out?"

"We'll all be cutting it out soon enough," said Tony. "Won't be any. This is all right. Tapped father's supply. A taste for every one and a swallow for me."

He was a sallow thin young person whom the sight of his own flask seemed to have waked into sudden joviality.

"I don't want any," said Allie. "Don't waste it."

Then as Tony Bates ignored her protest, she drained her glass accustomedly.

Barbara took her highball without a change of expression or color. Freda tried to refuse but they laughed at her.

"Come. You came to the city to have a good time."

She felt that she couldn't refuse without seeming prudish. She has a fear of what the liquor might do to her, a desire to do what the rest did.

Her head felt a little light, but that was all, and that only for a moment. It wasn't unpleasant.

They all finished the flask. They danced again, Freda with Tony Bates, Barbara with Ted. Then Ted sought Freda again. He danced as he had the first time but he held her even closer, more firmly, making his position into an embrace, and yet dancing perfectly. From over



one of the young men's shoulders, Barbara saw it. Her face did not show any feeling.

On the way home the embracing was a little promiscuous. Allie, dull from the liquor, lay sprawling against Tony's rather indifferent shoulder. Bob let the other Bates boy paw her lazily and Freda found herself rather absorbed in keeping Ted from going to lengths which she felt were hardly justified even by three or four highballs.

It was when they were home again after the young men had left that Freda felt the dislike of the other girl. It was as if Barbara had been waiting for the young men to go to make Freda uncomfortable.

"I hope Ted didn't embarrass you, Miss Thorstad?"

"Embarrass me?"

"Ted is such a scandalous flirt that he is apt, I think, to embarrass people who aren't used to him. I always keep him at a distance because he talks about girls most awfully."

"Oh, does he?"

"I'm glad he didn't bother you. Don't let him think you like him. He makes the most terrific game of people who let themselves in for it."

"Lots of people do let themselves in for it too," said Allie with meaning.

Barbara steered away from the dangers of that subject.

"I hope you're going to enjoy yourself, Miss Thorstad. There are no end of things going on."

"You mustn't bother about me," said Freda, "I'm afraid that I am going to be a burden."

Barbara let a minute pass, a minute of insult.

"No—not at all."

"Nonsense," said Allie, "everybody'll be crazy about you. You dance stunningly and the Bateses and Ted were nutty about you. You don't have to worry."

Freda said good night and left them. She went slowly up the staircase, thinking what fun it would be to climb that staircase every night, to go down it by natural right, to belong to it.

The sense of Barbara's dislike pervaded everything else. She felt that she must have made a fool of herself with that young fellow. He must have thought her a dreadful idiot. Ah, well, the first evening was over and she'd had some experience. She had been at a dinner where there was an entrée, she had used a fish fork, she had danced at a roadhouse. She laughed at herself a little.

"I've been draining the fleshpots of Egypt," she said, sitting on the bottom of her mother's bed. Her mother's prim little braids of hair against the pillow were silhouetted in the moonlight.

"You were very nice to-night," said her mother practically. "Mrs. Flandon wants us both to go there for dinner Thursday night."

"I like Mr. Flandon a lot."

"Very little idealism," commented Mrs. Thorstad, wisely.

## CHAPTER V

### A HUSBAND

#### I

**Y**ET something was hurting Gage Flandon. He had tried to decide that he was not getting enough exercise, that he was smoking too much, not sleeping enough. But petty reforms in those things did not help him. He felt surging through him, strange restlessness, curious probing dissatisfactions. He was angry at himself because he was in such a state; he was morbidly angry with his wife because she could not <sup>assuage</sup> ~~assuage~~ what he was feeling nor share it with him.

Everywhere he was baffled by his passion for Helen. After six years of married life, after they had been through birth, parenthood together, surely this state was neurotic. Affection, yes, that was proper. But not this constant sense of her, this desire to absorb her, own her completely and segregate her completely. He knew the feeling had been growing on him lately since her friend had come to the city, but his resentment was not against Margaret. It was directed against his wife and that he could not reason this into justice gnawed at him.

He was spending a great deal of time thinking about what was wrong with women. He would hit upon a phrase, a clever sentence that solved everything. And then he was back where he had begun. He could resolve nothing in phrases. He and Helen would discuss feminism, masculinism, sex, endlessly, and always end as antagonists—or as lovers, hiding from their own antagonism. But they could not leave the subjects alone. They tossed them back and forth, wearily, impatiently.

Always over the love for each other which they could not deny, hung this cloud of discussion, making every caress suspected of a motive, a "reaction."

When Gage had been sent at twelve years of age to a boys' military preparatory school, it had been definitely done to "harden him." He was a dreamy little boy, not in the least delicate, but with a roving imagination, a tendency to say "queer things" which had not suited his healthy perfectly grown body, his father felt. Some one had suspected him of having hidden artistic abilities. His parents were intelligent people and they tried that out. He was given instructions in music on the piano and the violin. Nothing came of them but ridges on the piano where he had kicked it in his impatience at being able to draw no melodies from it. With infinite patience they tried to see if he had talent for drawing. He had none. So, having exhausted their researches for artistic talent, his parents decided that there was a flaw in his make-up which a few years contact with "more manly boys" might correct. They prided themselves on the result. He succumbed utterly to all the conventions of what makes a manly boy and came home true to form.

In college the quirk came out again once in a while. But Gage never became markedly queer. Impossible for an all-American half-back to do that. And he never mixed with the "queer ones." What eccentricities he had, what flights of imagination he took were strictly on his own.

In due course he was admitted to the bar and on the heels of that came Helen. Those who saw him in his pursuit of Helen said that he seemed possessed. For once his imagination had found an outlet. For once all those desires which rose above his daily life and his usual companions had found a channel through which they could pour themselves. Eager for life as Helen

was, full of dreams, independences, fresh from her years at college, she could not help being swept under by the torrent of desire and worship that he became. They soared away together—they lost themselves in marriage, in the marvel of child creation.

The war came. Gage met it gravely, a little less spread-eagle than most of his friends. He had a year in France and came back with a fallen enthusiasm. He never talked about that. He had plunged into money making. The small fortune his father had given him on his marriage had been absorbed in starting a home and Helen had nothing of her own. They needed a great deal of money and Gage got it, trampling into politics, into business, practicing law well all the time. He was now thirty-eight and had accumulated a remarkable store of influence and power. Very close to the Congressman from his district, keen and far sighted, as honest in keeping promises as he was ruthless in dealing with political obstructionists, he was recognized as the key man to his very important district. He knew politics as he knew law but he built no ideals on it. It was perhaps his very thorough knowledge of the deviousness of its methods which made him reluctant to have Helen meddle with it. For although he had accepted the suffrage of women as a political phenomenon which had to be taken in hand and dealt with, he had no belief that the old game would change much.

He nearly always looked his full age. His face was one of those into which deep lines come early, well modeled, but with no fineness of detail. And his large built body, always carelessly dressed, was the same. Yet there were times, Helen knew, when his eyes became plaintive and wondering and he looked as the little boy who was sent away to be "hardened" must have looked. Only he was learning to cover those times with a scowl.



## A Husband

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He was finding that he could not quiet all the mental nightmares he had with his love for Helen. Because that love itself was infested by this strange new "woman problem." What securities of opinion had been swept away by study, by war, what questions in him were left unsatisfied—those things were hidden in him. He had clung to love and faith in marriage. And now that stronghold was being attacked. He was hearing people who called it all fake, all false psychology. And he did not know how much Helen believed these people. He felt her restlessness in horror. He saw no direction in which she might go away from him where she would not meet destruction, where false, incomplete ideas would not ruin her. It was making him a reactionary.

For, because he had no solution himself, he was forced to fall back on negations. He denied everything, sank back into an idealism of the past.

"I liked that girl," he said to his wife about Freda, "no fake."

"None," answered Helen. "I hoped you'd like her, Gage."

"She says that the trouble with women is that they've lost the spirit of romance and that they've dug the romance out of men's souls too."

It was what he himself had said but it was easier to put to Helen in that way.

"Young thing—full of phrases." His wife laughed lightly.

It was the night on which Freda and her mother were to dine with them. Gage, dressed before his wife, had dropped in to watch her. He loved to see her do her hair. She seemed exquisitely beautiful to him when she deftly parted and coiled the loose masses of it—more than beautiful—exquisitely woman. He loved to see the woman quality in her, not to awaken passion or desire

but for the sense of wonder it gave him. He loved to cherish her.

"We're all full of phrases," he said, a little hurt already. "But she has something behind her phrases. She's unspoiled yet by ideas."

"She's full of ideas. You should see the things that young modern reads. She's without experience—without dogmas yet. But she'll acquire those. At present she's looking for beauty. You might show it to her, she may find it in Margaret; perhaps she'll find it in her canting little mother."

"She would find it in you if you'd let her see you."

"Do you think I'm anything to copy? You seem dissatisfied so often, Gage."

"Don't, Helen." He came over to where she sat and bent to lay his cheek against her hair. Her hand caressed his cheek and his eyes closed.

She wanted to ask him what would happen to them if they could not bury argument in a caress but she knew the torch that would be to his anger. He felt her lack of response.

"I'm not dissatisfied with you. I'm dissatisfied because I can't have you completely to myself. I'm dissatisfied because you can't sit beside me, above and indifferent to a host of silly men and women parading false ideas."

"I'm not so sure they are false. I can't get your conviction about everything modern. I want to try things out."

"But, Helen, it's not your game. Look—since Margaret came you've been dabbling in this—that—politics, clubs, what not. You are bored with me."

"Impossible, darling. But you really mustn't expect the good, old-fashioned, clinging vine stuff from me. I'm not any good at it. Now please hurry down, dear, and

see if there are cigars and cigarettes, will you? And you'll have to have your cocktail alone because if I had one before Mrs. Thorstad she'd think I was a Scarlet Woman."

There was nothing for Gage to do but go with that familiar sense of failure.

After he had gone, Helen's face lost some of its lightness and she sat looking at herself in the glass. Without admiration—without calculation. She was wondering how much of love was sex—wondering how she could fortify herself against the passing of the charms of sex—wondering why Gage had such a frantic dislike of women like Margaret who hadn't succumbed to sex—wondering if that was the reason. She thought of the pretty Thorstad child. Gage liked her. That too might be a manifestation of vague unadmitted desire. She shivered a little. Such thoughts made her very cold. Then with a conscience smitten glance at her little porcelain clock she slipped into her dress and rang for the maid to hook it.

The nurse maid came and entertained Helen, as she helped her, with an account of the afternoon she had spent with Bennett and Peggy. Peggy had learned to count up to ten and Bennett was trying to imitate her. Helen wished she had heard them. She hated to miss any bit of the development of her fascinating children. It was a feeling that Margaret had told her she had better steel herself against.

## II

It was a wonderful evening for Freda. In the thoroughly friendly atmosphere she expanded. She made it wonderful for Gage too. He had the sense of an atmosphere freed from all censoriousness of analysis.



Freda was drinking in impressions, finding her way by feeling alone. He basked in the warm worshipful admiration she gave his wife.

They left early and Gage drove them home, leaving Freda at her hostess' door with a promise to give her a real drive some day and an admonition not to fall in love with any young wastrel. Part of their bantering conversation had been about Freda's falling in love and how completely she was to do it.

"I'll let you look him over if you will, Mr. Flandon."

"Fine," he said, "I'll see if he's the right sort."

He had told Helen he was going to drop in at the club for a few minutes and see if he could find a man he wanted to see. But the object of his search was not to be seen and Gage was about to leave the lounge when Walter Carpenter called him. Carpenter lived at the club. He was stretched in one of the long soft chairs before the fire, his back to the rest of the room. Gage stopped beside him.

"How's everything?"

"So-so."

Walter offered a cigar, and indicated a chair.

"No—I think I'll go on home," said Gage, taking the cigar.

"Better smoke it here."

For all his casualness it was clear that Walter wanted company. Gage dropped into the nearby chair and they talked for a few minutes, without focusing on anything. Then Walter began.

"Wonderful girl, that Vassar friend of Helen's."

"Margaret Duffield? Think so?"

"I've never seen a girl I liked as much," said Walter.

He said it in the cool, dispassionate way that he said most things, without any embarrassment. Embarrassments of all sorts had been sloughed off during the fifteen

years of Walter's business and social achievements. Gage looked at him frowningly.

"You don't mean you're serious—you?"

"Why not—I?" repeated Carpenter, grinning imperturbably.

He didn't look serious or at least impassioned, Gage might have said. His long figure was stretched out comfortably. It was slightly thickened about the waist, and his sleek hair was thinning as his waist was thickening. His calm, well-shaven face was as good looking as that of a well-kept, well-fed man of thirty-seven is apt to be. It was losing the sharpness and the vitality of youth but it did not yet have the permanent contours of its middle age. And it bore all the signs of healthy living and living that was not only for the sake of satisfying his appetites.

"Why—it never occurred to me," said Gage, puffing a little harder at his cigar.

"That I might get married?"

"I don't know. I rather thought that if you married you'd pick a different sort of a girl."

"I might have done that a long time ago. I've seen enough sorts. No—I never have seen one before who really—"

He paused reflectively, unaccustomed in the language of emotion.

"She's a fine looking girl." Gage felt he must pay some tribute.

"She is fine looking. She has a face that you can't forget—not for a minute."

"But," said Gage, "you must know that she's the rankest kind of a woman's righter—a feminist."

"What's a feminist?" asked Walter calmly.

"Damned if I know. It means anything any woman wants it to mean. It's driven everybody to incoherence.

But what I mean is that that kind of woman doesn't make any concessions to—sex."

They lifted the conversation away from Margaret into a generalization. Both of them wanted to talk about her but it couldn't be done with her as an openly acknowledged example.

"Well," answered Carpenter, "perhaps that was coming to us. Perhaps we were expecting women to make too many concessions to sex. There are a lot of uncultivated qualities in women you know. They can't devote all their time to our meals and our children."

"I don't object to their devoting their time to anything they like. I do object to their scattering themselves, wearing themselves out on a lot of damned nonsense. Let them vote. Granted we've got to have a few female political hacks like this Thorstad woman. It won't hurt her any. It's all right for Mrs. Brownley—and that type of wise old girl—to play at politics. But for a woman—a young woman who ought to be finding out all the things in life that belong to her, who ought to be—letting herself go naturally—being a woman—for her to go in for a spellbinder's career is depressing and worse."

Walter smiled quizzically.

"Haven't women always been just that, spellbinders? Isn't that the job we gave them long ago? Haven't women been spellbinders for thousands of years?"

"God knows they have," said Gage.

He was silent for a moment, recollecting his argument, then plunged on.

"It was all right when it was instinctive and natural but now it's so damned self-conscious. They're picking all their instincts to pieces, reading Freud on sex, analyzing every honest caress, worrying about being submerged in homes and husbands. It's wrecking, I tell you, Walter.

It's spoiling their grain. And I'll tell you another thing. It's the women's colleges that start it all. If I had my way I'd burn the things to the ground. They start all the trouble."

Walter broke the silence again.

"The reason I wanted to talk to you was because some of the difficulties you suggest were simmering in my own mind. And it always seemed to me that you and Helen got away with the whole business so well. You've had children—you've managed to keep everything—haven't you worked it out for yourself anyway?"

"You can't work it out," said Gage, impatiently, "by just having children. It doesn't end the chapter."

"It's a difficult time."

"It's a rotten time. You know I can't help feeling, Walter, that the women of this generation are potentially all that they claim to be actually. It isn't that I'd deny them any chance. But to let them be guided by fakirs or by their own inexperience will land them in a worse mess than ever. Look at some of them who have achieved prominence—pictures in the New York Times anyway. Their very pictures show they are neurasthenic. Look at the books written about them that they feed on. Books which won't allow a single natural normal impulse or fact of sex to go unanalyzed. Books which question every duty. Books which are merely tracts in favor of barrenness. Books written almost always by people who live abnormally. After a diet of that, can any woman live with a man wholesomely—can she keep her mind clear and fine?"

Walter shook his head—then laughed.

"Well—what are you going to do about it?"

"I'm not going to do a damned thing but growl about it, I suppose. As a matter of fact I don't care what most women do. But when I see the fakirs lay their

hands on Helen—Helen, who is about as perfect a woman —” he stopped abruptly, and then went on. “I’m not a very good person to talk to on this woman question. I’m balled up, you see. I only know that the trend is dangerous. They got their inch of political equality. Now they want an ell. They don’t want to be women any longer.”

“It’s all interesting,” answered Walter. “Of course, it’s difficult not to think in terms of one’s own experiences. Now I never have seen a woman like Miss Duffield. Of course I haven’t an idea that she’ll have me. But personally I’d be quite willing to trust to her terms if she did. I’ve never seen a woman of more essential honesty.”

They were disinclined to talk further. Gage, after a few trivialities, left Walter to his dream, conscious that what he had said had produced no disturbance or real question in the other’s mind. It was easy for one to transcend generalities with the wonderful possibilities of any particular case, Gage knew. He’d done it himself.

### III

Unconsciously as he went toward his home, he was doing it again. He had never lost the magic of going home to his wife. Entering the still hall, where the single lamp cast tiny pools of light through the crystal chandelier, he was pervaded by her presence. Somewhere, awake or asleep, above that stairway, was Helen. The gentle fact of it put him at peace.

Her door was closed and he went softly past it to his own room. Then, in a dressing gown, he settled himself in an easy chair by a reading lamp, no book before him, cherishing that mental quiet which surrounded him.

Down the hall he heard her door open quietly and her footfall on the soft rug. She had heard him come in

and was come to say good night. With a quick motion he turned out the light beside him and waited.

"Asleep, Gage?" She spoke softly, not to awaken him, if he were asleep.

"No—resting—here by the window."

She found her way to him and he gathered her up in his arms.

"You wonderful bundle of relaxation! Have you any idea how I love you like this?"

"Do you know, Gage, I think that for all our bad moments that we are really happier than most people?"

"There's no one in the world, dear, as happy as I am at this moment."

"And it isn't just because I'm—"

He bent his head to her, stifling her sentence.

"You mustn't talk—don't say it. It isn't because of anything. It just is."

"I know. And when it is—it swallows up the times when it isn't."

"Hush, sweetheart. Let's not—talk. Let's just rest."

He felt her grow even easier in his arms. All the instinct for poetry in him, starved, without vehicle, sought to dominate the relentlessness of her mind, working, working in its tangles of thought. The meaning of his inexpressible love for her must come through his arms, must be compelling, tender. They sat together in the big chair enfolded in peace. And the same little secret thought ran from one to the other, comforting them. This is the best.

## CHAPTER VI

### MARGARET

#### I

MARGARET made the faintest little grimace of dismay at the long florist's box for which she had just signed the receipt presented by the messenger. It wasn't a grimace of displeasure but a puzzled look as if the particular calculation involved was an unresolved doubt. Then she cut the pale green string and lifted the flowers out.

There were flowers for every corner, fnesia, daffodils, narcissus—everything that the florist's windows were blooming with during this second week of May. She touched them with delight, sorted them, placed them in every bit of crockery she could find. But Mrs. Thorstad sat in a chair drawn up before the mission oak table in Margaret's little rented apartment and waited. She was impatient that the flowers should have come at a moment when their discussion hinged on a crisis. And as if her respect for Margaret had fallen a little, she eyed the display without appreciation. Margaret talked, as she placed the flowers, however, as if she could separate her mental reactions from her esthetic.

"Well," she said, "you saw the way the thing went. It was absolutely cut and dried. I knew there was no chance of getting a woman elected as one of the regular delegates to the National Convention. Pratt and Abbott were the slate from the beginning. Every one knew Gage Flandon wanted them and every one knew that meant they were Joyce's choice if Flandon wanted them.

I had talked to Mr. Flandon about it but he wouldn't tell me anything really revealing. Except that the slate was made up and while they were very glad to have the women as voters that it might be better to wait another four years before they gave them a chance to sit in at a National Convention. He didn't intend to have a woman and especially he didn't intend to have one because he knew there was some agitation to send his own wife."

"That was what the mistake was, I think, Miss Duffield. I think another candidate might have done better."

"But they never even mentioned any woman," exclaimed Margaret. Then as if she got the other woman's meaning, she gave her a searching look.

Mrs. Thorstad talked blandly on. Margaret finished her work of beauty and came back to the table, tapping the surface of it with her regained pencil.

"What we must propose is a woman with a national ideal, a woman thoroughly interested in the district, conversant with its needs and with a democratic personality."

Thus definitely did Mrs. Thorstad outline what she believed to be her virtues, but Margaret did not seem to understand them as solely hers.

"Helen Flandon combines all those things."

"Personally," broke in the other woman, "I have always admired Mrs. Flandon immensely. But I have always felt that her interest in all these matters was perhaps a little transitory. That is no reflection on her, of course" (Margaret nodded acquiescence) "but a woman with so many domestic duties and with so much society life must necessarily not be able to give her whole mind to the work."

"She'd give her whole mind if she got interested enough and I think she is nearly interested enough now. Helen Flandon is big material, Mrs. Thorstad. She has



the genius of leadership. It's a bit banked with ashes just now but it could be fanned into flame."

"Won't the fact that she is Gage Flandon's wife work against her?"

"Not materially, I think. Of course that's one thing that bothers Gage. He thinks he'll be accused of using influence to get his wife in. Told me the thing was impossible on that account. Let him be accused of it. It doesn't matter. Her name will please the men. They'll think they're pleasing Flandon by letting her in and that's of course a thing he can't deny."

Mrs. Thorstad apparently did not get all the subtleties of those statements. A settled darkness had come over her face—a kind of clouded vision.

Margaret went blithely on.

She talked easily, wisely, giving the wounded hopes of Mrs. Thorstad a chance to get over their first bleeding, giving her a chance to get her hopes fixed a little on that political future which, although she was apparently not to be made delegate at large, still loomed ahead. She suggested that Mrs. Thorstad should surely be at the Convention in some capacity. And she went on, telling of the Washington leaders, the section leaders, of the general plans for work and education in politics among women. Then she spoke of Freda.

"Is she going to stay here after all? I do hope so."

"Well, I go home to-morrow. Mrs. Flandon has been interested in Freda's staying. She thought there must be things Freda could do here and Freda wants to stay. Freda doesn't typewrite but at the Republican headquarters there may be a place for her. Mr. Flandon has promised to speak to the chairman about taking Freda on as secretary. At first there'd be only a certain small amount of correspondence but later they say they could

put her in the campaign headquarters. I must go back to Mohawk. Freda stays for a day or so at Mrs. Brownley's—then if she takes this position, Mrs. Flandon will help her find a place to live. It's extremely kind of all of you to be so interested in Freda."

"She's a very wonderful young person. I only hope she gets more interested in us."

"She has all the irresponsibility of youth," said her mother, sententiously.

"Oh, by the way," said Margaret, "I promised to lend your Freda a book. Here it is." She took a book from the table and gave it to Mrs. Thorstad who eyed it a little questioningly.

"It's very stimulating if not altogether sound," said Margaret.

"So much of our literature is that." The older woman compressed her lips a little. "Not that I am not a Modern. But we are a little inclined to lose sight of the fact that our fathers and mothers—"

This time her little platform manner was interrupted by the ringing of the house phone. Margaret spoke into it, briefly.

"Why, yes, I'm nearly ready. I didn't realize it was so late. No, indeed not. Come in and wait for me."

"Don't hurry, Mrs. Thorstad," she added, hanging up the receiver. "Mr. Carpenter can wait."

But Mrs. Thorstad did hurry. And as she went out she met Walter Carpenter going in. She gave him her reserved little bow.

The two Thorstads were still at the Brownley house. The visit had turned out so much better than Freda had feared that two weeks had slipped away quickly for her while her mother was working and planning and making speeches to small clubs and circles along the lines her

hostess desired. Freda was out with Allison Brownley on this particular afternoon and the two guest rooms were empty as Mrs. Thorstad entered them.

She sat down in a straight chair (the habit of relaxing had long since failed her) and fell into thought, idly turning the pages of the book she had borrowed from Miss Duffield. A letter slipped out and fell to the floor. It had no envelope and as Mrs. Thorstad picked it up she read clearly the scrawl of writing in black, heavy masculine characters across the back of the page. It was a love letter to Margaret signed with a black sprawling male signature, "Gregory." So Mrs. Thorstad would phrase it with a little repression of her lips. There were words of passion—there was a flavor of intimacy—

She read no more than that back page. Then, holding the letter as if it offended her, she placed it in one of Mrs. Brownley's envelopes and addressed it to Margaret.

## II

"Did I drive away a visitor?" asked Walter.

"No—she was through with me. You're rather a relief."

Margaret could smile with the most complete friendliness of any woman he had ever seen, thought her visitor. She lifted her head and smiled straight at you. [There were no evasions in her way of showing that she was glad to see you. She didn't hold her gladness as a prize, but made you a straight gift of it. He liked the dress she was wearing—a fawn colored cloth dress that outlined the straight lines of her figure—he liked the way her hair grew away from its boyish side parting with a little curve here and there.

"I think I am a little early," he said, looking at his

watch, "but I thought since I was through at the office I'd come up, and you might be willing to come out for a ride before we dine. It's just five o'clock."

"That sounds very nice. Sit down and amuse yourself while I get my hat."

He obeyed, finding a book which did not seem to interest him at all but which gave him a chance to turn pages while she put on her hat and piled the papers on her desk. She turned to him as she was doing that.

"You spoil me."

"I'd like to spoil you."

"Spoil me by treating me like a human being—forgetting that I'm a woman and that you've been taught to flatter women."

"If I do that I can't remind you that I'm a man and it might be I'd like you to think of that."

It was very light. Their tones were the perfectly controlled tones of those who have emotions thoroughly in check. But the note of seriousness was there and they were both too wise to pretend that it wasn't.

"I'm quite ready to go," said Margaret.

He helped her with her cloak and they went down the stairway. Once in the car, with Margaret bundled in robes he turned to the boulevards and they fell into talk again. They liked to talk to each other. They elucidated things between them. They liked the calmness of each other's reactions, the sense of mutual control they had as they held a subject poised on their reflections, as they explored the sensitive delicacy of some thought. Politics, people, books—but always their talk strayed back to men and women. As if in that kind of talk they got most pleasure from each other, as if the subject were inexhaustible.

Walter had told Margaret a great deal about himself

and she had listened with interest. Then little by little under that cloak of the impersonal she had told him something of herself, her interest in women. "Not that I idealize them. I don't. But they are far more interesting than any work—their problems are the biggest in the world."

"Are you looking for still further concessions?"

"You mustn't use that word. We're looking for the truth in the situation. You think because we vote that the game's up, don't you? It's not. If women are ever going to be—women, Mr. Carpenter, they've got to develop all the qualities they've been letting rot and decay for hundreds of years. A few women have preserved the strength all women should have. But most of them—Do you dream that most of them have an idea of doing any real work—want any real work? Do you think they're going to give up their security of support without a struggle? They don't want independence in the majority of cases. They want certain rules relaxed for their convenience. But do you think that basically they want to give up their claim developed through ages as a 'weaker sex'?"

She stopped, at the little smile in his eyes. "You think I'm as oratorical as Mrs. Thorstad, don't you?"

"I do not, but I was thinking that it was time we had some dinner."

They stopped at one of the hotels and maneuvered their way through a crowded, ornate dining-room to a little table on the side of the room, Walter bowing gravely to a great many people as they went along.

"You're a very solid citizen, aren't you?" asked Margaret.

"I like solid citizens," he answered, "are they too on your list of obnoxious people and things?"



## Margaret

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"Of course they are not."

"I was a little worried after that list began developing. I don't want to be on the list of people you don't like."

But it was not until they had finished dinner and were drinking coffee that he developed that thought.

"I wonder if you know how hard you women are making things for men," he said, not abruptly but as if stating his brief.

"Perhaps it was too easy before."

"Perhaps. But you make it so difficult—you stand so aggressively strong—so independent of us that we can't find a thing with which to recommend ourselves. You don't want our protection—our support—you mistrust our motives."

"I told you this afternoon that I thought most women did cling to protection and support."

"Not the women we may want. You don't want the things I have to offer."

His tones had hardly raised. In her first moment of embarrassment Margaret fumbled for words but he went on in that same quiet tone.

"I thought it was as well to be frank with you. I couldn't see that I would gain anything by conventionalities of courtship. And I'm a little old to indulge in certain forms of wooing anyhow. I have never seen any woman I wanted to marry so much. I like your mind. And I mention it first because it is the thing which matters least. I like more than that the way you smile. I would always have the greatest enjoyment from you as a woman of intellect. But the real reason I want you to marry me is because you are a woman of flesh and blood—and all that that means."

She had flushed a little and as he ended in that controlled way, though for all his control he could not conceal the huskiness in his voice, she leaned forward

a little to him, as if in sympathy. But she did not speak. Her eyes fell away from his.

"I care for you just as all men have a way of caring for women, Margaret—I love you very much."

"I'm a very poor person to love," she answered, slowly.

"You're a wonderful person to love. Do you think you could care for me—ever? After you'd trained me a bit?"

"I like you to talk to—to be with as much as any one I've ever known," she said at last. "We've had a great deal of sympathy for each other. Of course I guessed you liked me. I rather hoped you wouldn't love me. Because"—and curiously enough her voice dropped as if in shame, almost to a whisper—"I'm so cold, Walter. I don't feel things like most women."

"Let's get out of here," said Walter, rising abruptly.

But he was unlucky. At the very door they were hailed by a passing automobile and discovered the Flandons, Jerrold Haynes and three other people, had seen them. They were invited to come along to the theater where there were a couple of vacant seats in the boxes the Flandons had taken. It seemed ridiculous to refuse. The play was conspicuously good, it was too cold a night for driving and they all knew that Margaret had no home to which they were going. So, unwillingly, Walter found himself made part of the larger group. For the rest of the evening he heard Margaret arguing with Gage, whom Walter noted, seemed very bitter on the matter of his wife's discussed entry into politics. He heard Helen say, suddenly and very quietly, after some rather blustering declaration of Gage's, "If the women want me, I shall go, Gage." Walter was conscious that there seemed an altercation beneath the surface, that the geniality of relation between Helen and Gage was

lessened. For a few minutes he thought Helen was flirting rather badly with that ass of a Jerrold Haynes.

As he took Margaret home she talked at length of sending Helen to the Convention.

"You've shelved me, haven't you?" he asked as they entered the tiny apartment so fragrant with his flowers.

"I didn't mean to. Come in and we'll talk about you."

"About you and me." He came in, readily.

"I didn't understand that was what you wanted."

She did not let him touch her and in the isolation of her room he could not persist. For a while he sat silent and she told him about herself and her lack of feeling. She had fine, clear, experienced phrases to tell of it. Yet she was conscious of making no impression.

"I've passed the marrying time," she said.

"Why?"

"It involves things which have passed me by—that I no longer need."

"You mean—children?"

"No—I haven't a lot of sentimental yearnings about them. But of course I would like to have children. There's an instinct to do one's duty by the race, in every woman."

He actually laughed.

"You chilled young woman. Well—what then has passed by you?"

She did not tell him. Perhaps there were no words, no definite thoughts in her own mind. She must have been full of strange inhibitions. Analysis crowded so close on the heels of feeling with her that she never could have the one without the other. All her study, her watching of men, all her study and analysis of women had made her mind a laboratory with her own emotions for victims of analysis.

Gregory had told her that in that sprawlingly written



letter, now in the post office, being sent back to her from Mrs. Thorstad.

Gregory held her thought for a moment. Then she looked at Walter with fresh appreciation. She liked to be with Walter. He didn't oppress her. His mind met hers without pushing. She felt protected in his companionship from that rude forcing of emotion which had been so hard on her.

He was going now. At the door he held her hand.

"I could be very good to you," he said, quietly. "Let me try."



## CHAPTER VII

### AN UGLY GLIMPSE

#### I

MRS. THORSTAD went back to Mohawk a few days later, leaving behind her a trail of increased prestige and carrying with her many assurances of appreciation which she could cogitate at her leisure. Her husband met her at the station, quietly, graciously pleased as he always was at a home-coming.

"So Freda stayed for a while," he said, as they went down the street his arm hanging heavy with her suitcase.

"Yes. It will be nice for her. Pleasant young girls, Mrs. Brownley's girls, although they haven't a great deal of mentality. Freda attracted quite a little attention. Miss Duffield is very anxious for her to stay in St. Pierre but of course Miss Duffield is an outsider and cannot exert any influence. Mrs. Flandon had some very sensible suggestions. They were going to see if there was a chance for Freda to get a place as secretary to the general Republican district committee and later do some work for the campaign committee. She can't typewrite and that's a drawback but they thought they might get around that. She'll know in a day or so. It needs the consent of the chairman and he's out of the city. But he'll probably do just what Mrs. Flandon asks."

"In the meantime Freda stays at Mrs. Brownley's?"

"Yes, and if she stays for a definite work, Mrs. Flandon will find her a place to live."

"The Flandons are nice people?"

"Oh, yes, a worldly sort, but very good. Mrs. Flandon is to be made delegate at large from the state if they can manage it."

"That's good stuff."

"She's hardly the person for it," said Mrs. Thorstad. "As a matter of fact I am convinced that if this visiting organizer, Miss Duffield, who after all is in a most anomalous position, had not urged it (she is an intimate friend of Mrs. Flandon's)—well, if she had not interfered I might have been made the delegate at large myself. As it is, I'll have to try to get the Federated clubs to send me. I ought to be there. It's important for the future. I should have been the candidate for delegate at large."

Her husband whistled and shifted the bag to his other arm.

"I'm very glad you were saved that grave responsibility, Addie," he said, with his unfailing tact.

"Yes—there is that side, of course. But this Miss Duffield is a person who'll bear watching. I never can see the point in sending these unsettled young women about the country organizing. They're dangerous in some ways. Now I happen to know that Miss Duffield is the sort of young woman who receives men in her rooms—it's only one room and there's a bed in it even if it has a cretonne cover—"

"Addie—Addie—!"

"But that's not all. At the same time she does receive men in her room—of course it may be all right and just a modern way—but she also gets passionate, very suspicious letters from other men."

Mr. Thorstad frowned. But they reached the house just then and in the business of entering and commenting



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on his housekeeping Mrs. Thorstad let the matter drop. She flew about efficiently and her husband sat back in his armchair and watched her. There was no doubt of his gladness at her return. His pleasant gray eyes were contented, a little sad perhaps, but contented.

"Freda isn't involved with any young men?" he asked.

"No—they tease her about young Smillie—that's H. T. Smillie, First National Bank, you know, but she says that's just nonsense."

### II

Yet it was that very night after the Thorstads had gone to bed and were sleeping in the pale light of a quiet moonlit sky, that Freda was forced to admit that it wasn't nonsense.

All along she had hated staying without her mother, who after all was her reason for being here. She had to do it, however, or else abandon the chance of getting the job as secretary to the committee. Freda herself was a little homesick under all her excitement but, steadying her, there had come letters from her father which urged her to make the most of any opportunities which might come to her, which bade her make suitable and wise friends and learn as much as she could.

One or two of the young men Freda met stood out, as being more interesting than the others. Ted Smillie, because he was so attracted to her from the first, had more or less intrigued her. Barbara's obvious dislike of the situation had forced both Ted and Freda into somewhat closer acquaintanceship than would have naturally developed, but they both worked against Barbara's interference. There was in Ted, for all his amorousness, a real feeling for health and beauty. That drew him to Freda and her to him and there was enough in the

glamour of being chosen by the most competed-for man as worthy of attention, to make Freda feel rather strongly in his favor. If he had been rude to her, as he might have been to the country guest of the Brownley's, she would have seen him more clearly, seen his weakness, his impressionability, read the laziness of his mind, seen the signs of self-indulgence which were already beginning to show on his handsome face. She would have seen him as too "soft" of mind and body. But he was frankly at her feet and it would have taken an older head than Freda's to analyze too clearly past that during those first few weeks.

It was not the first attention she had had, of course. There were always young men who were ready to be nice to Freda in Mohawk. But much as they had liked her they had not, as she would have said, "made love to her." Ted did that. In his own way, he was good at it and Freda was collecting experiences and naïve in spite of her power to get a perspective on her own situation. He had singled Freda out as capable of giving him a fresher thrill than any of the girls of his own "crowd." And he had ended by being pushed a little more than he expected by his own emotions. The prospect of Freda's return to Mohawk had annoyed him. He had felt that if she went now, it would be an incomplete experience. He wanted more than he had had. Freda had been pleasant, had been more than pleasant, been frank enough in showing how much she liked him. But he was used to more abandonment in the girls he knew—more freedom of caresses. He wasn't quite sure how far he wanted to go and of course he had no intention of marrying anybody, certainly not Freda. But he was unsatisfied.

Mr. and Mrs. Brownley had gone to Chicago the day after Mrs. Thorstad had gone home and the three girls

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were alone in the house with the servants. There had been a gay party at a hotel ballroom and at one o'clock the three girls had left the hotel with their escorts. Ted had his small car and Freda had wanted him to take Barbara home. But Barbara had demurred, strangely enough. She was going in the big car with the others, she said.

Barbara had been making life hard for Freda all day. Wherever they had been she had managed to make Freda miserable. When the older Brownleys were home, and when her mother was with her, Freda had never been so completely at Barbara's mercy as she was to-day. Allie, her usual ally, had suddenly fallen away too. The fact was that Allie, having pressed her mother for the purchase of the new runabout, had been put off on the ground that her father said it was too expensive and on the further ground that Freda's visit was not over and that anyway Mrs. Brownley had made no definite promise. Allie was disgruntled and the enthusiasm she had had for Freda having run its brief course, like most of Allie's enthusiasms, she was willing to lend some slight support to Barbara's evident ennui with their guest. All through luncheon Barbara had engineered an extremely rude conversation about things and places which were entirely foreign to Freda. Not once had she let her guest slip into the conversation. She had misled Freda deliberately into wearing her flame colored satin dress to a very informal afternoon affair and appeared herself, like every one else, in the most simple suit, making Freda feel foolishly over dressed. It was a little thing but it pricked Freda. At dinner she had asked some people to come in whom she knew would follow her lead and they had again left Freda high and dry on the conversational sands. It had not been a pleasant day and even as they danced, she and Ted, that evening, Freda felt Barbara's

eyes rather scornfully on her and guessed at the little tide of innuendo that was being set in motion. She knew Barbara's ways by this time. She could not stand it another day, she vowed. In the morning she would see Mrs. Flandon or go to a hotel or back to Mohawk.

It was clear that the others had not arrived when they drove up under the Brownley porte-cochère where a single light was burning. Freda did not want Ted to come in. She wanted to make her escape to bed before Barbara might arrive and make her a further target. Besides it was clear that Ted had been drinking and that he was most amorous. But he was insistent. The others would be along in a minute and he wanted to see one of the boys, he said.

They went into the long drawing-room. A single standing lamp was lit beside a big divan and at Freda's gesture as if she would turn on more, Ted caught her hand.

"Quite enough light," he said. "Come sit down."

His methods were not as subtle as usual and they frightened Freda. But she thought it wiser not to quarrel with him and sat down obediently beside him on the divan—much too close for her taste.

"You aren't really going away, are you, Freda?"

"I can't stay forever. My welcome's wearing a little thin."

She tried to pull away from that encircling arm but he would not have it. His strength had surprised her before, and she had not before minded his demonstrations. To-night she felt them as different, vaguely repellent.

"Please don't, Ted."

"I'm crazy about you, Freda. I've never seen a girl like you. There aren't any girls like you. Never have

been any. I never knew what it meant to be in love before."

And all the time that arm tighter, heavier. His face seemed to Freda to thicken. She discovered that she hated it. Abruptly she wrenched herself free. But he followed her and unfortunately she had gone to an even darker corner.

He pulled her to him and kissed her. It was the first time he had done it and it seemed to exhilarate him.

There followed one of the worst half hours of Freda's life. She kept wondering what had happened to the others. She was conscious of herself growing disheveled. She realized that he was in earnest, that he was excited past his own control.

In desperation she cried at him—

"But I don't care for you at all."

"That makes it more interesting to a man," said Ted, gallantly. "Anyway, I'll never give up."

"And," thought Freda, suddenly, with directness, "he hasn't said one word about marrying." With a kind of vague desire to sound the situation fully, she said—

"Do you really want me to marry you?"

The drinking that Ted had done had not improved his keenness of wit. He laughed.

"I think you could almost make me do that," he answered, "but what's the use of marrying? What we want is love—you know. I sized you up at the start. Freda—you wonderful girl—let me tell you—"

What he told her, the outlines of his plan, struck Freda with impersonal clearness. She had an odd sense of watching the scene from the outside, as an observer who jeered at her a little for being implicated. Similar scenes she had read about ran through her mind. She thought of Ann Veronica and Mr. Ramage. "He hasn't gone



quite far enough for me to actually fight him," she thought—and then—"I ought to ring for a servant or something—that's what's always done. I'm being insulted. I ought to either faint or beat him. I'm interested. Isn't it shocking!"

Above all these almost subconscious thoughts her mind dealt with practicalities. She wondered where the others were. She must get out of the house early in the morning. She wondered if Ted would keep this up even if the others came in.

She tried to get to the door but her movement towards escape roused him further. It had evidently never entered his head that she really meant to rebuff him. He caught her in his arms.

"So you see, beautiful, how easy the whole thing will be—"

He was growing noisy and she realized that she did not want the servants to hear. After all it wasn't her house. She saw that they had been alone for an hour. It was past two. And then to her immense relief she heard the limousine outside.

"The others are here," she said to him.

"Damn the others," he said mumblingly, and, without apology, forced himself into his overcoat. In the hall he seemed to recover himself. Perhaps his sense of social convention struggled and overcame his amorousness temporarily. He went out, past the entering girls, vaguely speaking rather at them than to them.

Nothing of what happened after that seemed quite real to Freda. She was fairly worn out from her trying day and hour of struggle and embarrassment. As she stood for a minute by a long window trying to collect her thoughts, she heard the girls at the door and it flashed through her mind to ease the disgust from her own mind



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by telling the whole business. She knew how frankly these girls talked of such things among themselves.

They came in, Barbara leading. With a quick, sharp movement Barbara turned on all the lights and as if in a spotlight the disarrayed parts of the room seemed to stand out, the rug in which Ted's foot had caught and which he had kicked aside, the several chairs at unfamiliar angles, the divan all tossed, with pillows crushed—most of all Freda herself, hair somewhat disheveled, cheeks angrily flushed. Allie looked a little queer as she gazed around. Barbara, after one scornful glance, never took her eyes off Freda.

"So you brought him here?"

"Brought him? Ted? Where were the rest of you?"

"You knew where we were. We said where we were going. We waited and waited at the Hebley's. Every one was wondering where you'd gone. You and Ted Smillie—at two o'clock. But I didn't really think you'd have the audacity to make my mother's house the scene of your—"

The awful thing, thought Freda, is that she doesn't believe that. But she's going to pretend she believes it and it's just as bad as if she did. Some one had let her in for this. It looks exactly as if—she looked around and the color swept her face again.

"You shameless girl!" Barbara went viciously on. "If my mother was here you wouldn't dare have done it. To think that we have to stay in the same house—to think—come Allie—"

But Freda was roused, infuriated. The scorn of her own position, a position which allowed her to be insulted by such a person, rose above all else. She flung her cloak around her.

"I wouldn't stay in your house another night," she cried, "if I have to sleep on a park bench all night."

The front door closed after her. As she reached the sidewalk she heard the door open again, her name called cautiously, heard the latch slipped. They were leaving the door open. As if she would go back—

She went through the streets swiftly.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ADVENTURE

#### I

**A**LL the time, under that motivating anger and determination not to go back, ran the two threads of thought—one quickly sifting the practicalities of a situation for a bare headed young girl in the streets of a city at two o'clock in the morning, the other analyzing, jeering at the melodrama of her position.

"It's a warm night," she thought, "I'll probably get nothing but a terrific cold in my head if I do sit in Lincoln Park all night. That young devil! She planned all that. She deliberately didn't tell Ted they were not coming straight home. There's no way of proving it. I'd like to bring her to her knees. I'll probably meet some fool policeman. How it will embarrass mother if this gets about. It's an ugly mess if I don't do things right. Nice ending to this visit. I knew the whole thing was bound to be disastrous. It was all a fake trip. That girl hated me from the start. As if I wanted that young fool."

She was walking in the direction of the park, past the long iron fences, the smooth sloping terraces which characterized the Brownley part of the city. The street was absolutely quiet. Street lamps seemed very bright as she passed them. Here and there a light gleamed in a house, a night light behind an iron grilled door. Her footsteps seemed to resound with disastrous noise. She felt the sound of her walking was a disturbance of the

peace, an affront to the quiet of everything about her. She hurried, trying to feel as if she were called out by illness, imagining what she would say if accosted, a little cooler of anger and beginning to be enthralled and intrigued by her own adventure.

Angry as she was, there was a thrill in the circumstances. She was sure she would not go back to the Brownley house and that resolve was backed perhaps by her interest in what might happen—what adventure might be awaiting her. Quite fearless and untroubled by any physical nervousness, her only anxiety was that she was not quite sure of how to meet any eventuality. But the night was hers. For a few hours she was thrown upon its mercy, and it exhilarated her, as if she had been released from annoying restraints. In her rush from the Brownley house she had satisfied a host of petty feelings which had been accumulating for weeks. It was as if she had broken through a horde of petty conventions which had been gaining a hold on her. She felt more herself than she had yet felt in the city. As she went along she almost forgot Barbara.

The park was still. The iron benches had long ago been deserted by even the last of the romantic couples. The policeman had evidently left the park for the night. Freda sat on a bench under a tree and tucked her feet under her to keep warm.

"Good thing mother insisted on an interlining in this coat," she said to herself.

She heard the clock in Trinity High School sound half past two, after what seemed a long time. She was already chilled and cramped. Then she heard a sound of voices and looked up to see two men on the far side of the park, half a block away. It made her a little apprehensive. She suddenly felt a little unable to cope



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with two of them. Two had no romantic possibilities. If it had been one wanderer—

Hurriedly getting up, she slipped through the shadows and cleared the park, thankful that her coat was dark.

"Well, then, I must walk," she said, trying to reassure herself by her own voice. Her feet were very cold and a little damp in their thin slippers. They hurt.

For a minute she considered going to Mrs. Flandon's house. But she abandoned that idea. Mrs. Flandon wasn't the sort of person she wanted to know about all this. She'd think she was such a fool. It might hurt her chances of getting that place. Did she want that place, she queried and kept her mind fixed on that for a little, sliding into a dream of what she might do and how she might confound Barbara Brownley.

By this time her walking had become fairly aimless. She had come through the residence district where she had been living, into a street of tall apartment houses. Here and there in the windows of these buildings lights still gleamed. Freda tried to amuse herself by wondering what was happening there, tried to forget her painful feet. Then she met her second adventurer.

He was walking very fast, his head up, and he rounded a corner so abruptly that she had no time to avoid him. As if he had hardly sensed her presence he passed her, then she heard his steps cease to resound and knew he was turning to look at her. He did more, he followed her. In a few strides he had caught up with her and Freda, turning her head, gave him a look meant to be fraught with dignity but which turned out to be only very angry. The man laughed.

"Oh, all right," he said, "if you look like that, maybe there is something I can do for you. I wasn't sure of what sort of person you were. But I see now."

His voice was rich and clear and pleasant. Freda could not see what he looked like but she could tell he was young, and he did not sound dangerous.

"Please don't bother me," she said, "I'm just—out for a walk."

"I hope you're near home," he answered.

Freda couldn't resist it.

"I'm just exactly a hundred and thirty-nine miles from home."

He tried to see her closely but her head was down.

"No, you're not crazy," he commented, "so there must be a story or a mystery to you. Can I walk home with you—the hundred and thirty-nine miles?"

"It's too far—and I'm really better alone."

"Please. I'm not in the least dangerous and I don't want to annoy you. But you must admit that a young woman at three o'clock in the morning ought to let somebody accompany her on such prodigious walks. I'm out for one myself. I'd enjoy it."

He talked like an Englishman—or an Irishman, thought Freda. And why shouldn't she talk to him. It was all too ridiculous anyway. But rather exciting.

"I'm in a very silly mess," she told him, "and I haven't any place to go to-night."

"And you wish I'd mind my own business?"

"No—but there's nothing you can do. I'm not in the least a tragedy. In the morning I can straighten things out. I haven't committed any murders or anything like that. But I said I wouldn't go back to-night, and I won't."

The young man considered.

"Is it by any chance a husband to whom you made that statement?"

"Oh, no," Freda laughed. "It wasn't a husband or even a father. It was just a girl."

"Well, you're a bit thinly clad to carry out your high resolve."

She shivered.

"Nights are longer than I thought."

"Oh, you're right there," said he, "nights can stretch themselves out to infinity. However, we must shorten this one for you. I'd just as soon do it by conversation but your slippers—don't you think you'd better go back—for this one night?"

"I couldn't."

"Well, I approve of high resolves myself. I'm used to them and seeing people offer themselves up on their altar. There's no real reason why you should give in on any position you took, just because the sun is on the other side of the world. Could you tell me a bit more, maybe? If names mean anything to you at this hour of the night, mine's Gregory Macmillan. I don't live here. I'm staying at some hotel or other and I came here on business—that's what you always say in the States, isn't it, when you give an account of yourself?"

"You're English."

"Oh, God forbid," he cried, "English! You insult me—but you don't mean to. No—Irish, Irish, Irish—I should have said it first and have been spared that accusation."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know what your accent was. I see now. It was stupid of me."

He laughed at her. "It's no matter. You're a very young woman, aren't you? I can tell from your voice. Well, you don't want to wander further with an Irish adventurer, do you?"

"I can't help myself."

"Let's get down to facts. You quarreled."

"Hardly that. I tell you it's a silly business. A drunk young man—a vicious girl who chanced to be my



hostess said things. So I walked out of her house. I can't go back without crawling back, can I?"

"No—you can't go back if you'd have to crawl. But where else can you go? Haven't you some friend—some intimate?"

"No—I can't disturb families at this hour—and I only know people here a little."

"Isn't there perhaps some single lady? Some unmarried woman to whom you could turn? At this hour of the night it may be easier, you know, than at dawn. And you're dressed for the evening. Of course we might go back to my hotel. Let's see—a motor accident might do. No—that would involve things. You're sure you don't know some discreet spinster?"

She thought.

"I've only been here three weeks. Only perhaps Miss Duffield—?"

He started.

"You don't mean Margaret Duffield? You know her? Why, of course, she's the very one. Do you mean her?"

"And you know her too?"

"Know her? I have been talking with her until an hour ago. You mystic child, of course you'd know Margaret. Come, let's go to her and she'll tell me about you—and I'll get a chance to see her again to-night even—and perhaps, with you in charge, she'll want to see me."

Freda was enchanted. Her feet were forgotten. Barbara was forgotten. The night, the delicious hour, the stranger who was chivalric and mysterious and knew Margaret Duffield,—all of it was rounding out a perfect adventure. She laughed in sheer delight.

"Isn't it marvelous?" she asked, "this meeting you—you knowing the only person I could go to, isn't it curious and like a well-made dream?"



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He took her by the arm, holding her up a little as they crossed the cobbled street.

"Life at its best is only a well-made dream," he answered.

In all her life Freda had never met any one who dared to talk like that.

It was three o'clock but the light in Margaret's apartment still burned. Little lines of it streamed out from the curtain edges. At sight of the light Gregory stopped.

"Lucky it's on the ground floor," he said, "she can let us in without any of the others hearing us tramp by."

Freda hung back a little.

"It's rather an outrageous thing to do. I wonder if I should."

"Nonsense. Anyway, you've no choice. I'm bringing my refugee here myself."

They tiptoed into the little hallway and rang her bell—then went over by her door. It was characteristic of Margaret that she did not call, "Who's there?" from behind the door. She opened her door a little and looked out.

"It's I," said Gregory, softly, "and a distressed lady, whom you know. Can we come in?"

The door opened wider and Margaret put out her hand as Freda shrunk back a little.

"Why, Freda—where did you come from?" Margaret looked at Gregory, but he waited for Freda to tell her own story, perhaps not knowing how much she wanted to tell.

In the light again, Freda had blushed scarlet and then turned pale, her cheeks wonderfully waxen and lustrous from the night air. Under her eyes there were circles of fatigue and her hair had clung to her head, damp from moisture. She looked at Margaret and seemed to remember that her adventure had begun in disaster.

"I'm so sorry to bother you like this—I'm so sorry. But he said I'd better."

Again Margaret exchanged glances with Gregory. Gregory was looking at Margaret now as if he were conscious of the picture she made in the blue Grecian negligée which suited that slim, straight figure so well. But if she noticed his glance, she was impatient of it.

"Of course it's no question of bother—but what is it?"

Freda had made no move to drop her cloak. She held it close around her as she stood against the inside of the door.

She told them as much as she could.

"I couldn't go back."

The eyes of her hearers were angry.

"Of course you couldn't," said Margaret, simply. "And you can perfectly well spend the night here. In the morning I'll send for your clothes."

She drew Freda, who was shivering now, over on the couch, then turned to Gregory.

"Good night, Gregory—again. You bring adventure with you."

There was a smile in her eyes which he seemed to answer by a look in his own. Then he looked past her to Freda.

"Good night, little wanderer. I'll see you to-morrow."

Freda saw him fully now. He was tall and thin and ugly. His dark eyes seemed to flash from caverns above his high cheekbones. But he had a wide Irish mouth and it smiled very tenderly at them both as he softly went out.

Freda would not take Margaret's little couch bed for herself so Margaret had to improvise a bed on the floor for her guest, a bed of blankets and coats and Freda slept in Margaret's warm bath robe. Oddly, she slept far better than did Margaret, who, for a long while, held herself stiffly on one side that her turning might not disturb Freda.



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### II

They both wakened early. Freda found the taste of stale adventure in her mind a little flat and disagreeable. There were a number of things to be done. Margaret telephoned briefly to the Brownley house, left word with a servant that Miss Thorstad had spent the night with her.

"I'll go up there after we have some breakfast," she said to Freda, "and get you some clothes. Then I think you'd better stay here with me. I'll ask the landlady to put an extra cot in here and we can be comfortable for a few days. And please don't talk of inconvenience"—she forestalled Freda's objections with her smile—"I'll love to have company. If you stay in town we'll see if you can't get a place of your own in the building here. Lots of apartments have a vacant room to let."

She was preparing breakfast with Freda's help and the younger girl's spirits were rising steadily even though the thought of an interview with Barbara remained dragging. It was great fun for Freda—the freedom of this tiny apartment with its bed already made into a daytime couch, the eggs cooking over a little electric grill on the table and the table set with a scanty supply of dishes—two tall glasses of milk, rolls and marmalade.

"It's so nice, living like this," she exclaimed.

Margaret laughed.

"Then the Brownley luxury hasn't quite seduced you?"

"I was excited by it. I'm afraid it did seduce me temporarily. But for the last week something's been wrong with me. And this was it. I wanted to get out of the machinery. They leave you alone and all that—but it's so ordered—so planned. Everything's planned from the menus to the social life. They try to do novel things by standing on their heads sometimes in their own

grooves—at least the girls do—but really they get no freshness or freedom, do they?”

“I should say that particular crowd didn’t. Of course you mustn’t confound all wealthy people with them. They’re better than some but a great deal less interesting than the best of the wealthy. And of course just because their life doesn’t happen to appeal to your temperament—or mine—”

“Are you always so perfectly balanced?” asked Freda, so admiringly as to escape impertinence.

“I wish I were ever balanced,” answered Margaret. “And now suppose you tell me a little more about what happened so I’ll be sure how I had better take things up with the Brownley girls.”

Freda had been thinking.

“It really began with me,” she said. “Ted Smillie was Barbara’s man and I was flattered when he noticed me. And of course I liked him—then—so I let it go on and she hated me for that.”

“Stop me if I pry—but do you care for the young man now?”

“Oh—no!” cried Freda. “I’m just mortally ashamed of myself for letting myself in as much as I did.”

“Everybody does.”

Margaret’s remark brought other ideas into Freda’s mind. She remembered Gregory Macmillan and his apparent intimacy with Margaret. But she asked nothing, going on, under Margaret’s questioning, with her tale of the night before, and as they came to the part of Gregory’s intervention, Margaret vouchsafed no information.

An hour later, she came back from the Brownley house, with Freda’s suitcase beside her in a taxi.

“You did give them a bad night,” she said to Freda, “Bob Brownley looks a wreck. It appears that later they

went out to search the park—scared stiff for you. And you had gone. They saw some men and were terrified.”

“Are they very angry?”

“Barbara tried to stay on her high horse. Said that although it was possible she had misunderstood the situation it looked very compromising and she thought it her duty in her mother’s absence—. Of course, she said, she was sorry that matters had developed as they had. Poor Allie’d evidently been thinking you’d been sewed up in a bag and dropped in the river. They both want to let the thing drop quickly and I said they could say that you were staying with me for the remainder of your visit. I also told Barbara a few home truths about herself, and advised her to be very careful what she said to her mother or I might take it up with her parents.”

“All this trouble for me!” cried Freda. “I am ashamed!”

“Nonsense. But I must go along quickly now. I’ve a meeting. Your trunk will be along sometime this morning. Put it wherever you like and the landlady will send the janitor up with a cot. And—by the way—if Gregory Macmillan drops in, tell him I’m engaged for lunch, will you? You might have lunch with him, if you don’t mind.”

“I feel aghast at meeting him.”

“Don’t let any lack of conventions bother you with Gregory. The lack of them is the best recommendation in his eyes. He’s a wild Irish poet. I’ll tell you about him to-night. I think you’ll like him, Freda. He’s the kindest person I know—and as truthful as his imagination will let him be.”

“What is he in St. Pierre for?”

“Oh, ask him—” said Margaret, departing.

## CHAPTER IX

### WORK FOR FREDA

#### I

IT was on that morning that Gage Flandon made his last appeal to his wife not to let herself be named as a candidate for Chicago at the State Convention. He had been somewhat grim since the district convention. As Margaret had realized would happen, certain men had approached him, thinking to please him by sounding the rumor about sending his wife to the National Convention. Many of them felt and Gage knew they felt that he had started, or arranged to have started, a rumor that his wife would be a candidate and that he meant to capitalize the entrance of women into politics by placing his own wife at the head of the woman's group in the State. It was a natural enough conclusion and its very naturalness made Gage burn with a slow, violent anger that was becoming an obsession. It began of course with the revolt against that suspicion of baseness that he could capitalize the position of his wife—that he could use a relation, which was to him so sacred, to strengthen his own position. Yet, when these men came with their flattery he could not cry down Helen without seeming to insult her. There was only one way, he saw, and that was for Helen herself to withdraw. If she did not, it was clear that she would be sent.

So he had besought and seemed to always beseech her with the wrong arguments. He knew he had said trite things, things about women staying out of politics, the

unsuitability of her nature for such things, but he had felt their triteness infused with such painful conviction in his own mind that it continually amazed him to see how little response he awoke in her.

She had said to him, "You exaggerate it so, Gage. Why make such a mountain out of a molehole? I'm not going to neglect you or the children. I'll probably not be elected anyhow. But why not regard it as a privilege and an honor and let me try?"

"But why do you want to try?"

She looked as if she too were trying vainly to make him understand.

"I'd like to do something myself, Gage—something as myself."

"You were content without politics two months ago."

"I've changed—why begrudge me my enthusiasm?"

"Because I can't bear to see you a waster like the rest of the women. Because you're so different. Everything about you is true and sound, dear, and when you start deliberately using yourself for political effect, don't you see how you become untrue? There's nothing in it, I tell you. The whole thing's cut and dried. There's no big issue. If the women want to send some one, let them choose some other figurehead!"

He had not meant it so but of course he seemed disparaging her.

"Perhaps," she said rather frigidly, "perhaps I'll not be such a figurehead as you think."

"But I didn't mean to say that to hurt you."

"I'm not sure what you do mean. It seems to me we're actually childish. You've chosen, quite deliberately, to be a reactionary in all this woman's progress movement. I'm sorry. But there is a loyalty one has to women, Gage, beside the loyalty one has to a husband and I really



cannot share your prejudice against progress, as it applies to women."

The unexpressed things in Gage's mind fairly tore at him.

"If you really had one sensible objection, Gage—"

"There's just one objection," he said, doggedly, "you desecrate yourself. Not by entering politics particularly. But by using yourself that way. You mutilate your sex."

She did not get angry. But she put one hand on his shoulder and they looked at each other helplessly.

"Don't you see," said Helen, "that I want, like these other women, to once in a while do something that's clean of sex? That's just me—without sex?"

His eyes grew very hard. She struck almost mortally at the very thing he loved most. And he moved away, as if to remove himself definitely.

"I'm sorry you feel so. It's a pleasant remark for a man's wife to fling at him."

Irony was so unusual in Gage that Helen stood looking after him after he went out of the room. Her mind ached with the struggle, ached from the assertion of this new determination of hers. Never had she wanted so to give him comfort and be comforted herself. She saw the weeks ahead—weeks of estrangement—possibly a permanent estrangement. Yet she knew she would go on. It wasn't just wanting to go on. She had to go on. There was a principle involved even if he could not see it. Clearer and clearer she had seen her necessity in these past two weeks. She had to waken her own individuality. She had to live to herself alone for a little. She had to begin to build defences against sex.

Gage was right. Margaret had sown the seed in his wife. Helen had not watched her for nothing. She had seen the way that Margaret made no concessions to her-

self as a woman, fiercely as she was working for the establishment of woman's position. It seemed paradoxical but there it was. If you were truly to work for woman's welfare you had to abandon all the cushions of woman's protected position, thought Helen—you couldn't rest back on either wifehood or motherhood. You couldn't be lazy. You had to make yourself fully yourself.

Here was her chance. She hadn't wanted it but they had insisted. The women wanted her to go to Chicago—not because she was Mrs. Flandon but because she was Helen Flandon, herself. A little quiver of delight ran through Helen as she thought of it. She would see it through. Gage would surely not persist in his feeling. Surely he would change. He would be glad when she proved more than just his wife.

She had a strange feeling of having doffed all the years which had passed since she had left college, a feeling of youth and energy which had often dominated her then but which had changed in the seven years of her marriage. Since her marriage she had walked only with Gage and the children—shared life with them very completely. Now it was not that she cared less for them (she kept making that very clear to herself) but there was none the less a new independence and new vigor about her. She felt with them but she felt without them too.

It hurt her that Gage should feel so injured. But her exhilaration was greater even than the hurt, because she could not sound the depths of her husband's suffering.

Gage went out of the house with no more words. He managed to focus his mind on the work of the day which was before him but the basic feeling of pain and anger persisted.

In the middle of the morning Helen called him, reminding him of his promise to see if Freda Thorstad could be

placed. She ignored, as she had a way of doing, any difference between them.

"Are you going to drag that child in too?" he asked, ungraciously, and then conscious of his unfairness for he knew quite well that the object was to place Freda so she could earn her own living, he capitulated.

"Drummond gets back this afternoon. Send Miss Thorstad in about four and I'll take her to see him."

"You're a dear, Gage," Helen rang off.

Gage tried to figure out whether something had been put over him or not. There he let it go and sat in at the club with a chosen crowd before lunch. It pleased him immensely to see Harry Harris stuck for the lunch. He kidded him, his great laugh rising and falling.

## II

At four Freda came and at her, "You're sure I'm not too early, Mr. Flandon?" Gage felt further ashamed of his ungraciousness. Freda was a little pale, after her difficult night, and it made her rather more attractive than ever to Gage. He thought she might be worrying over the chance of getting the new work and was eager to make it easy for her.

"So you want to get into politics like all the rest?" he asked, but smilingly.

"I want some work to do," said Freda, "I'd just as soon do anything else. But I really will have to work or go back to Mohawk and there isn't anything for me to do in Mohawk. I don't much care what I do, to tell you the truth, Mr. Flandon, so it is work. And I've a theory that I might be better at washing windows than doing anything else."

"This isn't much of a job, you know."

"Probably it's all I could handle. I'm really a little

nervous. Will they ask for all kinds of qualifications?"

"There's no 'they.' There's only one man and I think all he is looking for is some one who is discreet and pleasant and can do ordinary secretarial work."

"I'm going to learn typewriting evenings," said Freda.

It was so pleasant to be free from controversial conversation, or from conversation which glossed over controversy that Gage found himself feeling much warmer and more cheerful than he had for days. Together they walked over to the office of the man who had the district chairmanship. Mr. Drummond was embarrassed. Clearly he was embarrassed by the necessity of refusing a favor Flandon asked. But he was put to it.

They left the office and at the street corner Freda stopped and held out her hand.

"Pretty lucky for them that young Whitelaw got there first, I fancy."

"Have you something else in mind?"

"I'll try to find something. Maybe I can get a place as somebody's companion. Or maybe Miss Duffield will know—"

A tight little line came around Gage's mouth. He didn't want Margaret Duffield running this girl. His dislike was becoming an obsession.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "if you'd like to come into my office. I could use another clerk, as a matter of fact. I'm away a great deal and I find that since my assistant has been handling more law work he is too busy to do things around the office—handling clients, sorting correspondence and such things. The ordinary stenographer just messes up everything except a sheet of carbon paper, and the last good one I had got married, of course. There wouldn't be much in it—maybe sixty a month, say—but if you'd like to try—"

Freda looked at him straightly.

"If you're just trying to find a job for me, I'd rather not, Mr. Flandon."

He liked that, and gave her back honesty.

"Of course I would like to see you fixed. I thought this other thing would work out better. But in all seriousness I could use another clerk in my office and I've been wondering whom I could get. What do you say to trying it for a month—"

"Let me try it for two weeks and then if I fail, fire me then. Only you'll surely fire me if I don't earn my money?"

"Surely."

### III

Gage went home that night more cheerful than he had been for some time. He had a mischievous sensation of having rescued a brand from Margaret Duffield. At dinner Helen asked him if he had attended to Freda's case.

"Drummond had other arrangements already."

"What a shame," she said, "I wonder where we can place that girl. She is too good to go back and do nothing in Mohawk. And she really wants to earn money badly."

"I placed her," said Gage, hugging his mischief to himself.

"You did? Where?"

"I took her into my office."

Helen looked at him in surprise.

"You know that she can't typewrite?"

"I know. But I can use her. She has a good head and—a nice influence. I think I'll like to have her around. Since she has to work she'd be better there than grubbing in politics."



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"As if your office wasn't full of politics!"

"Well they're not Duffield-politics."

"Whatever you mean by that is obscure," said Helen,  
"but don't eat the child's head off, will you?"

## CHAPTER X

### THE CLEAN WIND

FREDA felt that night that all her dreams, all her vague anticipations of doing were suddenly translated into activity and reality. In the strangest way in the world, it seemed to her, so naïve was she about the obscure ways of most things, she had a room of her own and a job in St. Pierre. Margaret Duffield had smiled a little at the news of her job but at Freda's quick challenge as to whether she were really imposing on Mr. Flandon, Margaret insisted that she merely found Gage himself humorous. She did not say why that was so. Together she and Freda went to see the landlady about a room for Freda. There was one, it appeared, in an apartment on the third floor. Freda could have it, if she took it at once, and so it was arranged.

It was a plain little room with one window, long and thin like the shape of the room, furnished sparsely and without grace, but Freda stood in the midst of it with her head high and a look of wondering delight in her eyes, fingering her door key.

Later she went down to Margaret's apartment to carry up her suitcase. She found Gregory there. He had not come for lunch as Margaret had warned her. Seeing him now more clearly than she had the night before, Freda saw how cadaverous his face was, how little color there was in his cheeks. She thought he looked almost ill.

They did not hear her come in. Gregory was sitting with his eyes on Margaret, telling her something and



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she was listening in a protesting way. It occurred to Freda that of course they were in love. She had suspected it vaguely from their attitude. Now she was sure.

She coughed and they looked up.

"It's my damsel in distress," said Gregory, rising, "did everything clear up? Is the ogress destroyed?"

"If she is, poor Miss Duffield had to do it."

"She wouldn't mind. She likes cruelties. She's the most cruel person—"

"Hush, Gregory, don't reveal all my soul on the spot."

"Cruel—and over modest. As if a soul isn't always better revealed—"

"You can go as far as you like later. Just now you might carry Freda's suitcase upstairs."

He took the suitcase and followed them, entering Freda's little room which he seemed to fill and crowd.

"So this is where you take refuge from the ogress?"

"It's more than a refuge—it's a tower of independence."

He looked at her appreciatively.

"We'll agree on many things."

Margaret asked Freda to come down with them and she went, a little reluctantly wondering if she were not crowding their kindness. But Gregory insisted as well as Margaret.

Margaret sat beside a vase of roses on her table and Gregory and Freda faced her, sitting on the couch-bed. The roses were yellow, pink—delicate, aloof, like Margaret herself and she made a lovely picture. Gregory's eyes rested on her a little wearily as if he had failed to find what he sought for in the picture. He was silent at first—then, deftly, Margaret drew him out little by little about the Irish Republic, and he became different, a man on fire with an idea. Fascinated, stirred, Freda watched him, broke into eager questioning here and there and was



answered as eagerly. They were hot in discussion when Walter Carpenter came.

There was a moment of embarrassment as if each of the men studied the other to find out his purpose. Then Margaret spoke lightly.

"Do you want to hear about the Irish question from an expert, Walter?"

"Is Mr. Macmillan an expert?"

"He's to lecture about it on Friday night."

"It's a dangerous subject for a lecture."

"It's a dangerous subject to live with," answered Gregory a little defiantly.

"Are you a Sinn Féiner, Macmillan?"

"I'm an Irish Republican."

There was a dignity in his tone which made Walter feel his half-bantering tone ill judged. He changed at once.

"We're very ignorant of the whole question over here," he said, "all we have to judge from is partisan literature. We never get both sides."

"There is only one side fit to be heard."

Freda gave a little gasp of joy at that statement. It brushed away all the conventions of polite discussion in its unequivocal clearness of conviction.

"I was sure of it," she said.

Gregory turned and smiled at her. The four of them stood, as they had stood to greet Walter, Margaret by the side of her last guest, looking somehow fitting there, Gregory and Freda together as if in alliance against the others. Then conversation, civilities enveloped them all again. But the alliances remained. Freda made no secret of her admiration for Gregory. The openness of his mind, the way his convictions flashed through the talk seemed to her to demand an answer as fair. Her mind leapt to meet his.

Gregory Macmillan was Irish born, of a stock which was not pure Irish for his mother was an Englishwoman. It had been her people who were responsible for Gregory's education, his public school and early Oxford life. But in his later years at Oxford his restlessness and discontents had become extreme. Ireland with its tangle of desires, its heating patriotism, heating on the old altars already holy with martyrs, had captured his imagination and ambition. He had gone to Ireland and interested himself entirely in the study of Celtic literature and the Celtic language, living in Connacht and helping edit a Gaelic Weekly. Then had come the war, and conflict for Gregory. The fight for Irish freedom, try as he did to make it his only end, had become smaller beside the great world confusion and, conquering his revulsion at fighting with English forces he had enlisted.

Before the war Gregory's verse had had much favorable comment. He came out of the war to find himself notable among the younger poets, acclaimed even in the United States. It seemed preposterous to him. The machinations of the Irish Republican party absorbed him. Intrigue, plotting, all the melodrama, all the tragedy of the Sinn Fein policy was known to him, fostered by him. He had been in prison and after his release had fallen ill. They had sent him to convalesce in Wales. It was while he was there that there had come an offer from an American lecture bureau to go on tour in the States telling of Irish literature and reading his own verse. He laughed at the idea but others who heard the offer had not laughed. He was to come to the States, lecture on poetry and incidentally see and talk to various important Americans who might have Irish sympathies. The Republic needed friends.

He came reluctantly and yet, once in New York, he had found so many young literati to welcome him, to give

him sympathy and hearing if not counsel that his spirits had risen. And he had met Margaret Duffield and drawn by her mental beauty, her curious cold virginity, he had fallen in love with her and told her he loved her. For a few ardent weeks he wooed her, she explaining away his love, denying it. Then she had come West and he had sought his lecture bureau, making them include a lecture in this city which held her. He had come and found her colder, more aloof than ever, and now sitting in this room of hers he found a quiet, controlled, cultivated, middle-aged man who seemed to be on terms of easy and intimate friendship such as he had not attained.

After a little they divided their conversation. Margaret wanted to talk to Walter about some complication in local politics—something affecting Helen's election. And Freda wanted to hear Gregory talk.

He told her about Ireland, of the men and women who plotted secretly and constantly to throw off every yoke of sovereignty. He told of the beauty of the Gaelic tongue, translating a phrase or two for her—talked of the Irish poets and his friends and she responded, finding use now for all the thoughts that had filled her mind, the poems she had read and loved. The light in his deep set eyes grew brighter as he looked at the face turned to his, meeting his own enthusiasm so unquestioningly. Once he looked at Margaret curiously. She was deep in her discussion and with a glimmer of a smile in his eyes he turned again to Freda.

At eleven he took her to her room. They went up the stairs to the door of her apartment.

"Shall I see you between now and Friday night?"

"I'm going to work to-morrow." Freda came back to that thought with a jolt. "I don't know."

"To-morrow night? Just remember that I'm alone here—I don't know any one but you and Miss Duffield



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and I don't want the people in charge of my lecture to lay hands on me until it's necessary. You've no idea what they do to visiting lecturers in the provinces?"

"But hasn't Miss Duffield plans for you?"

"I hoped she might have. But she's busy, as you see." His tone had many implications. "So I really am lonely and you made me feel warm and welcome to-night. You aren't full of foolish ideas about friendships that progress like flights of stairs—step by step, are you?"

"Friendships are—or they aren't," said Freda.

"And this one is, I hope?"

They heard a sigh within the apartment as if a weary soul on the other side of the partition were at the end of its patience. Gregory held out his hand and turned to go.

But Freda could not let him go. She was swept by a sense of the cruel loneliness of this strange beautiful soul, in a country he did not know, pursuing a woman he did not win. She felt unbearably pent up.

Catching his hand in both of hers, she held it against her breast, lifted her face to his and suddenly surprisingly kissed him. And, turning, she marched into her room with her cheeks aflame and her head held high. Groping for the unfamiliar switch she turned on her light and began mechanically to undress. It seemed to her that she was walking in one of her own storied imaginings. So many things had happened in the last twenty-four hours which she had often dreamed would happen to her. Adventures, romantic moments, meetings of strange intimate congeniality like this with Gregory Macmillan. She thought of him as Gregory.

Gregory went down the stairs quickly, pausing at Margaret's door to say good night. The other man was leaving too and they walked together as far as Gregory's hotel. They were a little constrained and kept their

conversation on the most general of subjects. Gregory was absent minded in his comments but as he entered the hotel lobby he was smiling a little, the immensely cheered smile of the person who has found what he thought was lost.

Freda reported for work at the office of Sable and Flandon at half past eight the next morning. She had not been sure at what time a lawyer's office began operations and thought it best to be early so she had to wait a full hour before Mr. Flandon came in. The offices were a large, well-furnished suite of rooms. There were three young lawyers in the office, associated with Mr. Sable and Mr. Flandon, and three stenographers, in addition to a young woman, with an air of attainment, who had a desk in Mr. Sable's office and was known as Mr. Sable's personal secretary. Freda got some idea of the organization, watching the girls come in and take up their work. She became a little dubious as to where she could fit into this extremely well-oiled machinery and wondering more and more as to the quixotic whim which had made Mr. Flandon employ her, was almost ready to get up and go out when Gage came in.

He saw her in a minute and showed no surprise. Instead he seemed to be anxious to cover up any ambiguity in the position by making it very clear what her duties were to be. He introduced her to the rest of the office force as my "personal secretary" at which the Miss Brewster who held a like position in Mr. Sable's employ lifted her eyebrows a little. She was given a desk in a little ante-room outside of Gage's own office and Gage, with a stenographer who had done most of his work, went over her duties. She was to relieve the stenographer of all the sorting of his correspondence, take all his telephone messages, familiarize herself with all of his affairs and interests in so far as she could do so by consulting

current files and be ready to relieve him of any routine business she could, correcting and signing his letters as soon as possible.

At five o'clock she hurried back to her little room to find a letter in her mail box. It was from her father and at the sight of it she was saddened by the sense of separation between them. Every word in it, counsel, affection, humor breathed his love and thought for her. She was still poring over it when Gregory came to take her to dinner, and forgot to be embarrassed about the night before.

Gregory had never intended to be embarrassed evidently. He considered that they were on a footing of delightful intimacy. His voice had more exuberance in it to-night than she had previously heard. As they went past Margaret's door they looked up at her transom. It was dark.

"I hoped she was coming with us," said Freda.

"She doesn't want to come with me," answered Gregory, "and that has hurt me for a long time, it seems to me, although perhaps it is only weeks. But it may be just as well. For I could never make her happy."

"Would it be so hard?"

"I could never make any woman happy," said Gregory with extraordinary violence. "Happiness is a state of sloth. But I could live through ecstasy and through pain with some one who was not afraid. For this serene stagnancy which seems to be the end-all of most people, I'm no good. I couldn't do it, that's all."

His head was in the air and he looked, thought Freda, as if he would be extremely likely to forget about any woman or anything else and go sailing off in some fantasy of his own, at any time. She remembered him as he had been, despondent, when she had first met him, last night full of blazing enthusiasms, to-night blithely

independent. It delighted her. She had never before met a person who adjusted to no routine.

"Let's walk in peace and watch the clouds and I'll tell you what an old Irish poet said of them."

He could see her chin lift as she listened.

"To have in your mind such a wealth of beauty—what it must mean—to feel that things do not starve within you for lack of utterance—" Her voice was blurred into appreciations.

"Why let them starve?" asked Gregory.

"Perhaps because practical meat-and-drink body needs always claim the nourishment the things of your mind need—and you let the mind go hungry."

"That's it—that's what people do—but you won't. I hear it in your voice—see it in your face. The things in you are too vital to be starved. You can cripple them but you can't kill them."

"I do not know."

"You must set yourself free."

Freda smiled ruefully.

"That's what women are always talking about and what they mean is a washing machine."

"That's no freedom—that's just being given the run of the prison. Don't you see that what I mean is to keep yourself free from all the petty desires—the little peeping conventions—free for the great desires and pains that will rush through you some day? You have to be strong to do that. You can put up wind breaks for emotion so easily. And you don't want them."

"It means being very fearless."

"I have never yet met anything worth fearing except cowardice."

He stopped. They were in the middle of some sidewalk, neither of them noticed where.

"Why did you kiss me last night?"



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"I wanted to. I've not been sorry," answered Freda. "By all the rules I've learned I ought to be abashed, but you don't live by rules, so why waste them on you?"

Her smile was faintly tremulous. His strange, unfamiliar eyes looked into hers and rested there.

"And we won't have to spend time talking about love," he said, half to himself, "we shan't wear it threadbare with trying to test its fabric. It comes like the wind—like God."

Again they breasted the wind and her hand was fast in his. It was a clean, cool clasp. Freda felt oddly that she had saved her soul, that she had met an ultimate.



## CHAPTER XI

### NEWSPAPER CUTS

#### I

THE State Convention was imminent. In the vast barrenness of the Auditorium rows upon rows of ticketed chairs were filling up with delegates, sectional banners waved in the various parts of the big hall, flags made the background for the speakers, chairs and table.

"The machinery for creating a government is in progress," said Margaret, "what do you think of it?"

Helen shook her head.

"Inadequate. When you think why they have come, how they have come, what destinies they hold in their hands. Would women do it better I wonder, Margaret?"

"Women are more serious. Perhaps. Anyway we must try it. If we don't like that machinery we'll have to invent another kind."

"Funny male gathering. Think they all have their women—and their feeling towards their own women must influence their feeling towards all of us. Their own women to treat cruelly or kindly—or possessively."

"They're on the last lap of their possession," answered Margaret.

The gallery was filling with women, reporters, spectators with one interest or another. The men were taking their places, formality settling on the assembly. The temporary chairman was on the platform, welcoming them, bowing grandiloquently with a compliment that was inevitable to the ladies in the gallery. Nominations for

a chairman were in order. The temporary chairman retained his place as he had expected. The committees on credentials, resolutions, organization, retired and the delegation heard with some restlessness further exhortation as to the duties which lay before them and the splendor of opportunity awaiting the party in the immediate future.

The platform was read. Cheers, a little too well organized and not too freely spontaneous, punctuated it. The women listened to it attentively, Margaret frowning now and then at some of its clauses.

It was a long task. On its consummation the convention adjourned for lunch.

It was mid-afternoon before the business of electing the delegates at large to the National Convention had been reached. Helen felt her face grow hot and her heart go a little faster even while she mocked at herself for those signs of nervousness. Margaret watched as if her finger was on the pulse of a patient.

Hedley's name went through nomination as every one had expected. Then Jensen was on his feet.

He was good. The women admitted that after his first words. He dwelt upon the fact of suffrage, on the practical differences it made in the electorate. He spoke of the recognition of women as a privilege. Then with a reference which Helen had feared must come he spoke of the one woman whose name is "familiar to us through the fine party loyalty of her husband" and who is herself "the unspoken choice of hundreds and thousands of women of this State" as their delegate. Helen heard her name come forth unfamiliarly, heard the burst of clapping, faced the barricade of glances with a smile.

There was little doubt about it from the start. What opposition there was must have decided it unsafe to show its teeth. An hour later a discomfited man, pushed off

the party slate by a woman, edged his way out of the back of the gallery and the woman was surrounded by a group of men and women, all anxious to be early in their congratulations, some from sheer enthusiasm, others from motives more questionable.

"And where is Gage passing the cigars?" asked one man jocularly.

Helen looked around as if in surprise that he was not there.

"He isn't here, is he?"

She knew he wasn't. She had known he wouldn't come, even while she could not quite kill the hope that he would.

At the door were photographers, even a moving picture man waiting for the new woman delegates. Margaret dropped Helen's hand and Helen, on Mrs. Brownley's arm, moved past the range of picture-takers with an air of complete composure. In a moment she was in her car and moving out of sight. Margaret turned to walk back to her own apartment, complete satisfaction on her face.

## II

Helen entered the house quietly and leaving her gloves and wrap on the hall bench, went into the kitchen to see how things were going there. There was a pleasant air of competence about it. The maids were busy and the dinner in active preparation. Upstairs the nurse had the children. She played with them a little, a warm sense of satisfaction at her heart. It was so absurd to choose—to fake a choice. This other work, this other business could be done without sacrificing anything. Gage was absurd. She was no less a mother, not a bit less good a housewife because she was a delegate to the Republican Convention. It took a bit of management, that was all. If she was treating Gage badly she would feel different.

But there was a guilty feeling which she could not control. He was unhappy and she the cause. They had been too close for that not to hurt.

At seven o'clock, a little late for dinner, came Gage, a guarded courtesy in his manner. He asked her pardon for not dressing and handed her a sheaf of evening papers. She was thankful that they had been issued too early to contain the news of her triumph. It postponed certain altercations. She thought suddenly of her barrage of photographers and of what she had completely forgotten, Gage's tremendous dislike of having her picture in the papers.

"I can't bear the thought of your picture tossed about the country—looked at casually for an hour and then used as old newspapers are used—to wrap a package—line a stair-rug—heaven knows what!"

Of course it had appeared occasionally for all of that but Helen had made the occasions infrequent. She had always liked that prejudice of his. As she looked at him to-night she thought he looked tired. There were strained lines around his eyes, and he was very silent.

She said several little things and then, because avoidance of the big topic seemed impossible, joined him in his silence. He looked at her at last, smiling a little. It was not the smile of a rancorous man but rather a hurt smile, a forced smile of one who is going to go through pain wearing it.

"I have been congratulated all the way home on your account, Helen. It seems to have been a landslide for you."

"There was hardly any opposition." It was meager but she could not go on without seeming to run into a forbidden or aching subject.

There they had to stop. Helen had a vision of the closed topics between them, a sudden horror of this

cleavage. Suppose he didn't see that he was foolish, that she was not treating him badly, that she must lay up something for herself as a person against the day when he himself might weary of her as a woman. Fiercely she recast her arguments in her own mind. Yet there was that tired look in his eyes. You can fight rancor but not weariness.

"How is Miss Thorstad getting on?"

"Fine. It was a great hunch. You know she actually saves me a lot of thinking. It shows that a girl with wits is worth half a dozen expert stenographers. She has an air about her that is dignified and calm and yet she's not a stick."

"I imagine there's a volcanic soul under that rather calm exterior."

"Perhaps."

"Gage, you look tired."

He made a visible effort to rouse himself.

"Tired? Why, no, dear. Not especially."

"What are we to do to-night?"

"I have some work to-night."

She looked somewhat baffled as the door closed after him a half hour later. Then going to the telephone she called Margaret. Margaret was not at home. Helen read for an hour and went to bed early.

Gage had meant to work. But he was not working. He was fighting on through a cloud of bitterness and of thoughts which he knew were not wholly unreasonable. He was sitting at his littered desk, all the paraphernalia of work strewn about him and a picture of Helen on his desk confronting him, accenting his trouble. There she was. He had only to close his eyes and he saw her even more clearly, breaking through the clouded doubts of his mind as she had done in the first days of his marriage—clearness, peace, the one real beauty in the world, the one

real truth in the world—Helen—love. And she had said she wanted to be “clean of sex!” He scowled at the thought but it danced before him defiling his memories. It would not go! From those early days, those days of the “hardening process” there had persisted always in Gage secret faith, fading now to a hope, flaring now to a conviction that sex was clean, was beautiful until some other agency defiled it. He remembered still his tortured adolescent mind revolving around the problems of the mysteries of birth, stirring him to wonder and the leering clandestine ugly talk which seemed an ugly wrapping around the wonder. He had always thought that his son would have no such tortures. His own proven conviction would carry the boy through all doubts. Now he seemed cast back in the mire of his own old doubts. Had Helen always felt defiled? Had all their life been a hideous mixture of shame and complacencies and hidden revulsions? Had they really conquered nothing? Or was there nothing to conquer? Was he over-fastidious, unmanly? Was the necessary thing to blunt once more, this time permanently, these illusions of his—to go home to Helen and play the part of the demanding husband, demanding concession in return for concession? Laugh at her whims, her fads, quarrel with her if necessary. If she must run to her conventions, let her go. And let him coarsen his feeling so it was willing to take what was left of her.

He wiped his forehead impatiently. It was damp and that sign of his intensity shamed him. He had learned that the revealing of emotion was man's shame, to be hidden at all costs. Helen had given him a final lesson in that. Angrily he flung himself into his work, concentrating actually with his will for hours, mastering the intricacies of the question on which he must give an opinion in the morning. When he had done his notes lay

ready. He cleaned up the litter of papers, a little frown on his face and looked at his watch. Nearly midnight. He must go home.

All the practical machinery of locking up, starting the car, steering, driving into the garage, locking the garage, turning out the lights in the library. Nothing was different from other nights. He was a man in his own house. But over the formalism of his actions and his deliberate definiteness of conscious thought his mind was in battle. He was trying to kill the part of him that cried out against going to his wife in such a mood. He was trying deliberately to kill it with a blunt edged thought which read "Be a man—not a neurasthenic." He cursed himself under his breath. He was no damned temperamental actor to carry on like this (Always, always, that choking necessity for repressing these feelings, concealing the fact of feeling). A married man—seven years—rights—duties—nature—foolish whims—but above that persisted the almost tortured cry of his spirit, struggling with the hotness of desire, begging, for its life—"Don't go home like a beast to her!"

### III

In the morning Helen was again worried by his appearance.

"What time did you come in, Gage?"

"About midnight."

"You look as if you'd slept wretchedly. Did you?"

"Well, enough." His tone was surly. He could not bear to look at her, shining haired, head held high, confidence, strength, balance of mind, justice, radiating from her. He knew what a contrast he made—she did not need to tell him of his heavy, encircled eyes, his depressed mouth.

She pushed his hair back from his forehead, standing beside his chair. It was a familiar gesture between them.

"Gage, you mean more than anything else to me. You know that?"

He mumbled an answer.

"But don't resent it so awfully because I can't believe that loving is a woman's only job. We mustn't absorb each other."

Quoted, he thought bitterly, from Margaret Duffield. Quite reasonable too. Very reasonable. He suddenly hated her for her reasoning which was denied to his struggling instincts. All desire, all love in his heart had curdled to a sodden lump of resentment.

He picked up the paper. There was Helen, marching across the page, smiling into the camera's eyes. Curious men with hats and crowding women showed in the blurred background. He looked from the picture to the real Helen.

"Very good picture."

His tone was disagreeable. And he had not answered her appeal.

"Be fair, Gage."

Very well, he would be fair.

"I haven't the smallest sympathy with all this, Helen. I know you regard that as unreasonable. It may be that I am. But I don't believe you're bigger or better because of all this. You've done it from no spirit of conviction but because you were flattered into doing it. The Duffield girl is simply using you for her own convictions. With her they at least are convictions. But with you they're not."

"That's quite enough, thanks, Gage."

He was cruelly glad he had hurt her. How it helped the ache in his own heart!

Helen thought: "He's jealous of Margaret. Terribly



jealous. It's abnormal and disgusting. What has happened to him?" She let him leave the house with what was almost a little life of spirits when he had gone. She had not time to sift these feelings of Gage now. Later, if they persisted. She wondered if he should see a doctor, thought for a moment of psycho-analysis, speculating as to whether that might set him straight. But the telephone began ringing frantically.



## CHAPTER XII

### GREGORY LECTURES

#### I

THE committee on entertainment of visiting lecturers had called upon Gregory at his hotel and been pleased. He had the ear-marks of eccentricity, to be sure, but in their capacity of hostesses they were used to that. Geniuses might not live in St. Pierre but they were frequently imported thither and as a matter of fact several had grown there, though their wings had been only budding when they had taken themselves to the denser air of the great cities.

They had met him now and he pleased them. His fine courtesy, the slight exaggeration of his manner, his deference to their arrangements and his lack of pompousness charmed them. They withdrew after he had politely but firmly refused invitations for either lunch or dinner saying that he must concentrate before his talk. He neglected to mention that he was concentrating on Freda and was planning to meet her at a lunch room outside her office where she had said they would have a chance to talk.

A clean, white table needing no cloths to cover its shining metal surface with two bowls of oyster stew, steaming very hot, furnished him and Freda their occasion.

She told him Margaret had asked for him.

"And you told her?"

"That I was having dinner with you to-night. I didn't mention lunch. Wasn't that ridiculously secretive?"

"It was deliciously secret."

"I don't think I should monopolize all your time, though," she demurred.

"Freda!" He was frowning now. "You aren't going to waste time like that, are you? You aren't going to hint at cheapness and little crippled conventions, are you?"

"No, I'm not. I was just saying—words. I wasn't thinking. I suppose I was trying to hold you off for a minute for some obscure reason."

He glanced at her very tenderly.

"You needn't hold me off, darling. But it's such a short time. And there's nothing in the world as wise as to seize the cup of joy when it's full. There's an undiscoverable leak in that cup and it empties if you dawdle over it. It may be accident—death—or human perversity—almost anything. I'm so sure our cup is full now that I want to drink it with you quickly. Listen—there's nothing in the world against it except that some person whom neither of us cares about at all might say we weren't considered—were too hasty. For the sake of that obscure person whom we don't know, you aren't going to send me away, are you?"

She was hesitant.

"It doesn't trouble you longer that I came out here to see Margaret Duffield, does it?"

"A little," she answered honestly.

"It shouldn't. It shouldn't and it mustn't. With her it was all argument and all tangle—with you it was like a flash of light."

"I don't want her to matter," said Freda, "I always have wanted my love to come like this. Without question. Fearlessly."

"Then you will, darling?"

"I don't care about the rest, but there's father. I hate to not tell him."

"Will he hate it when you're happy?"

"He'll love it."

"Then—listen. I shall tell him—later. I'll tell him that I always prayed that when I married I wouldn't have to have the eyes of the world on the coming of my bride. That my wedding should be secret and holy. If we could tell him without the rest knowing—but he would tell your mother, wouldn't he?"

"And mother would want a wedding," said Freda, a little drearily.

He leaned across to touch her hand.

"You don't think it's furtive—clandestine?"

"Oh, no!"

"Do you want me to go?"

"No—"

"I must go on, you see—those damned lectures. I must have the money. And I must go through to Spokane. I could ask you to wait until I got back but, darling—what's the use of waiting? What's the use of waiting? We could be married to-morrow—and have Sunday together. Then—then—we could wait for each other. Or you could come with me—"

"No, we couldn't, Gregory. It's too expensive. You know we couldn't."

She was so definite that his face fell. At the sight of it she smiled and reassured him.

"I shan't mind a bit not having any money."

"Money's a nuisance. But I want enough of it—I'll earn enough of it to take you to Ireland with me, when I come back in six weeks."

Her forehead was a little knit. He went on eagerly.

"I've never been so practical. You wouldn't believe what a man of affairs—American affairs—I've been. I looked up the name of a little hamlet where we could go to-morrow afternoon and be married by sundown. And

then, sweetheart, an eternity of a day before us—and immortality to look forward to.”

“And no one to know.”

“Unless you wish it—no one.”

“I don’t wish it. It sounds dangerous and mad—but if I don’t, Gregory, I know I’ll regret it all the rest of my life. It’s my chance to prove life. It’s not as if I had the faintest doubt of you—”

“Never have I been married,” he laughed, “I’m poor and that’s the worst of me. You can read all about me in the papers to-day. They tell the worst.”

“Freda, darling, I’ve always wanted to steal the secret of life. Come with me—and we can do it.”

There was a flame in her eyes—a response as urgent as his call.

“That’s what I’ve wanted too—all my life.”

The waitress at their table glanced at them impatiently. They dallied too long—this gawky, skinny, black haired young fellow and the girl in the dark blue cape. Making love, all right. She was a pretty girl too, but no style. All that heavy, yellow hair half slipping down her neck. She’d do with a bob.

She had a still greater impatience as she searched the table in vain for the tip they had forgotten.

## II

The committee in the ante-room glanced cheerfully in at the crowd gathering for Gregory’s lecture. They had hoped for a big audience but it was a bad week. The town was full of the Convention delegates and in little mood for lectures, they had feared. But people came. Fully a thousand people had gathered to hear the lecture on Ireland and its Poetry.

They wondered a little at some of the people who bought

tickets at the door—men whom they were sure never had attended any lecture under their auspices before. That was because they did not know that Gregory Macmillan's name was one familiar to other circles than the literary poetic ones—that his vigor in the Irish Republican cause had been told even on this side of the Atlantic. There were those who would have come to hear a lecture of no other subject—Irishmen who had heard his name and subject announced at their meeting of the Knights of Columbus. The literary-minded, the students, the people who patronized the lectures of the Collegiate Alumnae as they did all semi-social affairs, sat side by side in the hall and watched Gregory as he came out from the faded wings at one side of the amateur stage.

Margaret Duffield, Carpenter, Helen and a rather unwilling Gage had adjoining seats. Gage had been extremely disrespectful in his characterization of the lecture, the society which gave it and the presumable character of the man who was to give it, especially as he learned that he was a friend of Margaret's.

Yet it was Gage who enjoyed the lecture most. From the opening sentence it was clear that the discussion of Irish Poetry was to Gregory merely a discussion of Ireland. In Ireland to be a poet meant that one thought deeply enough to be a patriot. All his poets were patriots.

He made no specific indictment of England except as he read with passionate fervor the translation of Padraic Pearse from the old Irish—

"The world hath conquered, the wind hath scattered  
like dust

Alexander, Cæsar, and all that shared their sway.

Tara is grass, and behold how Troy lieth low,

And even the English, perchance their hour will come!"

It was a quotation and he did not comment on its content. But he sketched the lives of some of his poets—his friends—his leaders. He made their dream clear—their simple idealism—their ignoring of the politics of expediency—their lives so chaste and beautiful. He told of their homes, their schools,—and sometimes when he ended simply, “He was killed in the attack of ———, shot by the military”—or more briefly, “He was executed on——,” a shudder ran through his audience.

He would show the gayety of Ireland, the joy of the people, their exuberance—and end with a simple “Of course it is not like that now. There is much grief and mourning.”

It was not politics. It was a prose poem composed by a poet. One could not take exception to it as political but the hearers would forever have their standpoints colored by what he said. It was like a picture which, once seen, could never be forgotten.

Margaret listened, her ready mind taking exception to some of the things he said, seeing how he played upon his audience—Walter and Helen listened with intellectual appreciation. But Gage, slouched down in his seat felt envy grow in him. There was before him what he had always wanted. A man who had something indestructible, something immortal to care for. A conviction—and an ideal—an outlet for his soul. He felt himself cheated.

He liked too to listen to the poems about women. No controversial tirades these poems—but verses soft and sweet and pliable as the essence of women—once had been. He checked his running thoughts and looked at his wife, sitting beside him with her head high, “conscious of herself, every minute now,” he thought bitterly.



## CHAPTER XIII

### LIFE ENTRUSTED

#### I

**F**REDA worked until noon the next day. Saturday was a half holiday with the employees of the firm so there was no question of her remaining in the office longer. All morning she worked steadily, almost absorbedly. It was as if she held her ecstasy off from her, unwilling to even think about it yet.

She had spent the night before, after the lecture to which she went alone, in writing a letter to her father. It was a long intimate letter, telling of the kind of work she was doing, the way she was living and of what she was thinking. She wrote as if she were talking to him, on and on, and her ending was like the conclusion of a talk, as if she asked for his blessing. "So you see, father dear, I'm all right. And I want you to know that I never forget what you've said to me—that I must live so that I'll never be ashamed of having had life entrusted to me."

She was really not afraid at all. Her demurring had been only the mechanical reactions of conventions which sat lightly on her. In her heart she knew that she was at home with Gregory and that the completeness of their mutual understanding could mean only that they belonged together. Gregory, like her father, reassured her. In the midst of his impetuousness, his driving thinking, she felt the purity without which he could not have been quite so free. She felt his kindness too, and the gentleness of his hands. He was like her father, she thought.



Her father had perhaps had the glory of adventure in him too once, but it had been made submissive to circumstance. It had left its residue of understanding. She felt very sure that when he knew he would be glad.

Physically her fine fearlessness and eager nerves kept her from any reaction, or from any of the terrors, real or assumed, which women have come to believe right and modest at the approach of marriage. And minor faults of Gregory she never paused to consider. It would not have occurred to her that it was a fitting time to look for them. Little problems, living difficulties troubled her serene health not at all. She would have been ashamed to measure them up against her love. The latent spirit of adventure in her, her fine romantic training, taken from books and preserved because of her limited knowledge of people, were like winds blowing her on to the heart of her romance.

With all this strength and surety, this Ali Baba's cave of beauty to explore, it was yet characteristic of her that she could work. She had been in the office four days and already her place was made. It was easy to see that she was intelligently competent and to know that her efficiency was not a matter of making a first impression. They all liked her and she already was beginning to lighten work for various people.

Flandon was not at the office at all on Saturday. He called up in the course of the morning and speaking briefly to Freda told her to tell Mr. Sable that he was going out of town over the week-end and would be back for the hearing of the Kraker case on Monday morning. That made it easier for Freda. She had a little fear that there might have been some extra duty for her on this Saturday afternoon which would wreck the golden plans. So at noon she put her desk in order—she was beginning to feel

her proprietorship in a desk now—and went back to her room to get her bag, packed the night before.

She had meant to leave a note for Miss Duffield, but by chance she met her on the stairs. Margaret looked at the bag and made her own quick deduction.

“Going home for the week-end?”

“I’ll be back Monday,” said Freda, feeling rather rotten as she let Margaret’s misunderstanding pass.

But she forgot about that. She forgot everything as she went out in the street full of May sunshine and ran for the street-car which would take her to the railway station. There, in the noon crowd, she put her bag between her feet and hung on to the strap above her head, unable to keep the smile from her face any longer.

Gregory was there waiting for her. And at the first word he spoke, his spirit of exalted happiness carried Freda up into the heights. He had a word of endearment for her and then with her bag and his held in one hand, he managed with the other to hold her close to his side and they went to find their train.

There was an empty seat. That was the first piece of luck, when the train already looked impossibly full of men and women and families, setting out with baggage which overflowed from the seats to the aisles. But there was the seat, at the end of the coach, undiscovered yet, or perhaps miraculously set apart for them—made invisible to other searchers—its red plush surface cleanly brushed for the journey and a streak of sunlight like a benison across the back of it.

Freda slipped in beside the window and, placing their baggage in the little rack, with a touch that was almost reverent for Freda’s bag, Gregory sat down beside her.

“We have an hour and forty minutes,” he declared, “and look, my darling.” He took out of his pocket a tiny

white box, but, as she stretched her hand, he put it away again.

"You mustn't see it. Not yet. But I wanted you to know I had it. It's the most divine circlet of gold you ever saw. The halo of my wife."

His voice was very soft and tender, the contact of his body against hers caressing.

A boy went by with sandwiches. They surprised each other by regarding him intently and then it occurred to Freda why they did so.

"Did you forget lunch too?" she cried.

So they lunched on ham sandwiches and Peters' milk chocolate and water in sanitary paper cups and the train creaked into action, joltingly, as befitted a day coach in a local train.

Little stations twinkled by with sudden life and between them lay fields and valleys where life pushed quietly to the sun. They watched the villages with tenderness. Each one unexplored was a regret. There were so many things to be happy with. A child came running up to get a drink of water and leaned on the edge of their seat, staring at them curiously. They liked that. It seemed as if the child guessed their riot of joy and peace.

They had found that it was necessary for the haste of their marriage to go over the borderline of the state, a matter of forty miles. And they alighted in a little town of which they knew nothing. It was impressive as they looked about. Straight neat roads led away from the red roofed station.

"I'd like to walk into the country," said Freda.

"So we shall. But first we must be married."

He left her in the parlor of the little hotel while he went to find the justice of the peace. In half an hour he was back, exultant.

"Nothing dares to hamper us," he declared. "Now, beloved."

So they were married, in the little bare office of the justice of the peace, with a clerk from the court called in to witness that they were made man and wife by law. Gregory slipped the "circlet of gold" on the finger of his wife and as he made answers to the questions put to him, his eyes were on Freda as if he spoke to her alone, as if to her alone was he making this pledge of faith and loyalty and love. Freda did not look at him. For the moment she was fulfilling her pledge to life and Gregory was its instrument.

Then they were out again in the sunlight, choked with emotion, silent. Vaguely they walked back to the hotel. It was mid-afternoon.

"Shall we stay at the hotel?" asked Gregory.

"It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all. Only it would be nicer in the country, wouldn't it?"

"There should be inns," said Gregory, frowning for the first time that day as he looked at the square, ugly, frame building which was before them, a knot of curious loafers on the porch. "In Ireland we have inns. They're somehow different."

"I truly don't care where we are," smiled Freda and for that his eyes glanced down to hers with admiration.

None the less he went to inspect the little rooms of the hotel and came down depressed.

"I don't want you to go up there, darling. Let's see if there isn't some other place."

The hotel keeper, clerk and manager, reflected on the inquiry which Gregory tried to make polite.

"Of course there's the Roadside Inn if you're looking for style. Five miles out. Jitney take you there."

"I know that place," said Freda, "That's lovely,

Gregory. Oh, I think you'd like it. Only it may be noisy. They dance there at night."

The proprietor misunderstood.

"So far as dancing goes here we dance here till midnight too," he said, full of pride.

Gregory laughed.

"Well, sir, we think we'd like to be in the country to-day. We'll try the inn you so kindly speak of."

The jitney ride gave them further sense of adventure and when they stopped in front of the little inn with its quiet air and its stiff little flowerbeds aglow with red geraniums, they were enchanted. Their room pleased them too. A little low-ceilinged room with bright chintzes and painted furniture and a casement window that stood a little open. The colored man who played the fiddle at night, carried up their bags. When he had left them, Gregory kissed his wife.

Ten minutes later they went down the brown road where the dust lay soft under their feet. White birches and young elders all fresh and green with early summer foliage surrounded them. Then from the road a little trodden path slipped back into the woods.

"Shall we try it?"

The woods closed behind them. The little path led a faltering way between trees where long streams of sunlight fell. Under their feet grass rustled. Branches leaned to touch them. All the woods seemed to know that lovers were passing and whispered tremulously.

Gregory heard the whispers and turned to the girl at his side. Each heart heard the other as he stopped to hold her in his embrace until they grew faint with joy.

"I love you, Freda," said the man, ever restless.

Freda smiled at him. It was all she could do. Demonstrations of love were new to her. She was



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unbent, ready for caresses but not yet quite responsive except in the fine clarity of her mind. It was Gregory who must stop to bring her hand to his lips, to hold her against him for a silent moment.

The woods grew thinner.

"Ah, look," cried Freda, "the enchanted woods end in a farmhouse yard!" She was standing on a little knoll and beneath them could be seen the farmhouse and its buildings, a group of children, perhaps the very ones who had trodden the path on their daily way to school.

"I like it," said Gregory. "It's love bending into life. Don't you like to see it from here—like a pastoral picture? Children, kittens, the thin woman going to carry the scraps to the chickens. See, Freda—isn't life beautiful?" Freda saw it through his poet's vision for a moment. It was truly beautiful—the group held together by the common interest of procreation and maintenance—but she saw that more beautiful still were the eyes of Gregory. She had a sudden feeling that she must never dim his vision. Whatever might come she must protect that vision even though, as now, she might see that the farm below was full of signs of neglect and that the children quarreled.

They turned back and sat on the trunk of a fallen tree and he took off her hat and stroked her hair gently as she lay against his arm. They did not talk much. Incomplete little phrases in constant reiteration of their own happiness. Those were all.

The dusk came early and damply in the woods. They went back to the Inn, a little chilled, and Freda brushed her hair into neatness and went down to meet her husband in the dining-room. It was a strange and familiar feeling to see him standing by the door waiting for her. They were very hungry and talkative now. With the darkness

outside, intimacy pressed closer upon them and they were shy of it, deliciously shy, enticing it closer to them by their evasion of it.

So after their dinner they sat in the little guest parlor of the Inn and watched each other, talking about irrelevancies until the whiz of a motor outside made Freda start.

"You know, Gregory, I'd sooner go upstairs. I know some of the people who sometimes come here. I'd rather not see them to-night."

"Yes, darling."

In their bedroom the muslin curtains were tugging at their sashes, trying to pull themselves free. A breeze of thick soft coolness came through the room. Freda felt as if her heart would burst with very wonder. Life to be known so deeply—so soon. And, as was strange and frequent with her she lost the sense of everything except Life, a strange mystery, a strange progress, of which she was an inevitable part, spreading about her, caressing her, absorbing her. She was not thinking of Gregory, until he came, knocking so absurdly, so humbly on the fragile door that her mind leapt into sudden pity, and personal love.

"You are like a white taper before the altar of love," breathed Gregory.

Around them in the soft darkness the breeze played lightly. Beneath was the sound of dance music, of occasional laughter. They heard nothing to distress them in their complete isolation. Only when the music became tender, falling into the languorous delicacy of a waltz it added witchery to their rapture.

## II

In the morning it was Gregory who was the practical one—Freda the mystic. Her mind was filled with

mystery and dulled with the pervading sense of her husband. He was inconceivably more to her than he had been. She was infinitely rich with thought and revelation and too languorous to think. Gregory overwhelmed her. In his spirited tenderness, declaring her the miracle bride of the world, talking an unending poem of love to her, he was active now—she dreamy and spent. He brought her breakfast and sat beside her while she ate it. And suddenly it became clear to them that their time was slipping quickly by.

It had been the plan to return to the city that night but they found it impossible to leave each other.

"If we rose with the bawn, we could motor back," said Gregory, "and I could take the train of abomination that is bearing me somewhere or other into a barren country and you could be rid of me for a little. Oh, my darling, the eternity of the next weeks!"

"The eternity that will come after!" she said smiling.

So they decided to spend another night in the little inn. There were several other guests there but they had a feeling of owning the place. The lean, colored waiter in the dining-room smiled at them and their absorption, and gave them the attention he usually reserved for those too drunk to tip wisely. The chambermaid found pins for a forgetful Freda and smirked at her as she gave them, with full knowledge of the honeymoon. Even the manager on being told they would stay another night, smiled.

Every one smiled. They went for a long walk in the evening and a carter gave them a ride back to the inn. What was that but the charm of luck which was upon them?

It was Sunday night but though there was no dancing, people dropped in on motoring parties, ready to be warmed by hot suppers before they took the last stretch of the ride



back to the city. And it was as Freda was going upstairs, still in that rapt absorption which had held her day that one of the incomers saw her and stopped still in amazement. She was in profile before him, her head held high and she was turning the curve of the stairs, walking slowly.

The observer walked up to the desk and spoke to the manager who sat making out bills behind it. There was no visible register, though his eyes cast about for one.

"Who was the lady who was going upstairs?" he asked unwisely.

His manner did not recommend him.

"A lady who is stopping here," said the Swedish lady with some hostility, affronted by the casual question of this young gay fellow. She had observed Freda and was unlikely to give out information to young loafers.

"I thought I knew her." Ted Smillie tried to get on firmer ground.

His interlocutor seemed to grunt in dubiousness.

He gave it up and went into the dining-room, trying to find out more from the waiter. But the waiter was not too free. He had not been in a roadhouse inn three years without learning a kind of discretion.

"Lady and her husbun', suh. Several couples here. Couldn't make sure, suh."

But Ted knew whom he had seen. He knew there had been no mistake. After all, except for a flare of jealousy, even that not too keen in his increasingly tasteless emotions, he would have felt that the man did not matter. But if she was that kind, why on earth had she turned him down? That would be his reasoning. And, flavoring the whole, that vitiated detective instinct which makes gossips of little minded men, was interested, and he was anxious to tell his story. He did not choose the two men with whom he was supping for confidants. He

managed to get one of them to ask to see the register, just on the chance that it might throw light on Freda's companion. But it did not help him. A party of young men and women had sprawled twenty or thirty names on the register last night. Ted did not know them and where that party began or ended he could not tell. There was not a recorded name familiar to him for the last three days. He went back to the city with his friends and the Roadside Inn grew quiet.

Freda and Gregory could not sleep. There seemed a million new thoughts in the mind of each of them, contending with the few hours they were to be together.

"I can't bear to have morning come—and the end—" said Freda softly. She was more dependent now.

"Say the word and I'll cancel the contracts."

"You couldn't. You know you said there'd be a forfeit. We'd be paying your bureau the rest of our lives. No—you must go. And I'll be happy. But when you come back you'll never go again. I'll be no modern woman, I feel. I'll be the sort of woman who cries when her husband goes to work."

It was delightful nonsense.

"I don't understand modern woman," said Gregory, "you're not modern. Modern is fashionable—that's the most of it. You are eternal, darling. You only happen once in a thousand years and then only in the dream of a poet. I hate your modern woman, living by her little codebook of what she shall give and what she shall not give—what children she will bear, what income she must have—who shall earn it. One can't measure life that way. It's got to be measured by freedom or slavery. Either you're free and brave, ready to sound depths of life if they're worth sounding or you're a slave and too cowardly to do anything but obey the rules."

She did not answer. She was in no mood for discussion.

## CHAPTER XIV

### WHAT WAS TO BE EXPECTED

#### I

**M**ONDAY was busy in Sable and Flandon's office. Conferences, a dinning of telephones, a vast opening of mail. Every one was conscious of important work in transaction. The Laidlaw case was having its first hearing before the District Court and it was understood to be worrying, ticklish business. The Judge was irascible and his point of view of the case important from this first hearing. Both the partners were at the office by half past nine and left together, one of the younger lawyers accompanying them, much as young doctors are present at a skillful operation, to learn and observe.

Freda, watching and hearing much of the office talk, discreet as it was, wished she could have gone along too. She was feeling very fit, buoyed up by the first strength of separation when it is a delight to feel one's capacity for cheerfulness and bravery in the midst of loneliness. She wanted to plunge very hard into work, to do something important, to get thoroughly absorbed in her work and not to dawdle into dreams. So she told herself strongly. At night, when she was alone, she would live with her memories and her dreams. It was youth's swagger in the presence of emotion. She was busy until Flandon left the office, making memoranda of things to be done, getting papers for him, keeping him from telephone interruptions. But after ten o'clock the office settled



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down and became quiet. The clerks were hammering away endlessly at their typewriters, the few clients who came in were quickly taken care of, and Freda found herself harder to control. She was looking up a list of references that Mr. Flandon wanted ready by noon and answering his telephone. It was not absorbing work. Try as she would, her mind slipped away from her and concentrated on amazing facts.

She was a married woman. A week ago she had been a girl visiting at the home of the Brownleys'. Rapid enough the events which had led to her working here—but this other secret whirlwind—how strange it all was. She wondered if lives were like that. Going along placidly enough until they struck the edge of the waterfall of circumstance and then—. All lives must have secret strange places. She had loved, in Mohawk, to reflect on those sometimes. Spoon River had never quite gone out of her mind. She had always, since she had read it, seen people as other than the reflection of their acts and seeming—speculating on the curious contradictions of appearances and motives. Here she sat, working, Gage Flandon's clerk, Eric Thorstad's daughter. And those two things mattered not at all—gave no key to her. It mattered only that she was the wife, the secret wife of a man whom she had known six days. Physically, chemically, actually she was altered. That was life. When you found it, you held it to you secretly. You never told. That was why you couldn't tell about people. Life might be caressing them, making itself known to them, biting them. Over it all the vast illusion of action. It was illusion.

The morning drifted by. At a little after twelve Mr. Sable and Mr. Flandon came in together. It was easy to see that things had not gone well. They were self-contained, sober, but the lines of Gage's face were ugly

and those of his partner disapprovingly set. They went into Mr. Sable's office and closed the door. Freda, getting on her hat and coat, heard the young lawyer who had accompanied them, speaking to a colleague.

"Didn't go well. Flandon got Judge Pratt mad. Something got under Flandon's skin and he didn't play the old judge very well."

That was all she heard.

At the moment Gage was hearing the same thing. Sable was walking about the office in some irritation explaining it.

Gage had continued to handle his work badly at the office. Like many a man with a hobby he took his hobby into business hours. But the concession which might be made to a man on account of golf, on account of curling, were not to be made for a man who had a boresome way of bringing in the eternal question of whether women were progressing or "actually retrogressing," "whether all this woman movement weren't a mistake,"—and so on. Needing support, comfort, consolation, encouragement and direction, Gage, as he felt about for them, only became somewhat absurd.

Men are not tolerant of those who bore them, except sometimes in the family, where such things are endured for practical reasons. They moved away from Gage, so to speak, while he talked on.

Sable noticed it. He had his own irritation, growing more focused each day. To begin with, they would lose the Laidlaw case and it was all, Sable thought, due to that false start which Gage had made. He had rather decisively taken the matter out of Gage's hands towards the end but the thing had been lost already—or he preferred to think so. Sable could bear to lose cases but not a case which involved so much money. It frightened off the right sort of clients.



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When Gage was a cub lawyer, arguing cases with flaring energy in the local courts, Sable had picked him out as a bright young man. He had kept his eye on him and his progress, with sheer admiration for the practical genius with which he picked up important clients and gained and held their confidence. He edged in on politics after a little—and in Mr. Sable's own party. Then King and Sable had made a proposition to young Flandon—that he join them, bringing his clients, of course, and coming in, not as an ordinary apprentice lawyer but as the colleague of Mr. Sable. It was an amazing offer to be made to so young a man. Gage accepted it. Two years later King, rather elderly now and ready to retire, went to Congress and the firm name changed from King and Sable to Sable and Flandon. Flandon made good. He made important alliances for Mr. Sable, he played the political end for Mr. King, he made money for himself.

These things were not to be passed lightly over and Mr. Sable had them all docketed somewhere in his mind. He was fond of Gage too, in his own restrained way. But Sable was fifty-eight. He had seen many a brilliant start end in disaster, many a man with ability fail. He knew most of the signs of failure in men. He knew further exactly what steps Gage should take to achieve eminence. They were broad and fair before him. Instead it was increasingly clear that Gage was not keeping his mind on his work—that he was letting his nerves get the better of his judgment. For some reason or other he was making a fool of himself. When a man made a fool of himself, there were, in Sable's experience, one of three things back of it—a woman, liquor or speculation. He was watching Gage to see which of these things it might be in his case.

All this talk which Flandon was always getting off about women now—thought the senior partner—that was

camouflage. He felt fairly convinced that Gage must be playing the fool with some woman. Irregular and disappointing, with a lovely, fine looking, distinguished wife like Mrs. Flandon. Rotten streak in Flandon probably. Sable chose the woman solution rather definitely. Gage drank when he could get it of course. And he nearly always had a supply on hand. But he used his head about it pretty well. It didn't seem like liquor trouble. As for speculation—surely he wouldn't play the fool there. There was plenty of money coming to Gage, and he always could get more.

It must be a woman. Probably Flandon was trying to keep it from his wife and that was what was on his nerves. Some little—Sable characterized Gage's visionary lady impolitely. He thought on, his mind lighting, for no apparent reason, on Freda. And there it stopped. Queer, Flandon's bringing that girl into the office. Bright enough but no experience. Unlike him too, considering his usual impatience with inexpert assistance. He wondered—

So while the Brownley girls gossiped in ugly, furtive, rather lustful conversations and Ted Smillie told his little discovery on occasion as being an instance of what those "smooth touch-me-not girls were usually up to"—while Mr. Sable, his mouth tight in repression and his eyes keen, watched and noted Freda. Freda went on her serene way. She was serene and she was happy. At times her happiness seemed to shut her completely off from every one—even in her thoughts from her father. She never tired of exploring her memory for the sound of Gregory's voice, the touch of his hands, the mystery of love. More and more as the days went by she hugged her secret to herself. She could not have shared a vestige of it. Its exquisite privacy was part of its quality. She had the vaguest notions of what might be waiting her as Gregory's



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wife. Certainly she might have a baby—normally that probably would happen to her in the next nine months. Gregory was poor. They'd have to work. And there might be hard things. She thought once or twice that it might be an ugly sort of proposition if she did not have the particular feeling she did for Gregory. But there it was. It wasn't a matter of the mind—nor of physiology either. She didn't believe it was physiology which made her deliciously faint and weak as she read Gregory's strange letters—letters so frequent, so irregular, so curiously timed and written—on the back of a menu, on a scrap of envelope, on a dozen sheets of hotel paper. Each message, beating, alive, forcing its entrance. This was the love that according to Margaret was the undoing of her sex. She knew she would go anywhere Gregory wanted her to go, to be with him. That she knew her life with him would have its independence completely in so far as her own love allowed it, did not make it less clear to her that even if the independence had been less, if she had found him a man of convention she would none the less—but would she?

She was immensely interested in possibly having a baby, and anxious to know about it. She wanted to tell Gregory. She wrote him letters in which she spent the deepest of her thought. She said things in her letters which would have astounded her if she had read them over. But she never did read them after she had written them. It would have seemed almost like cheating to read them as if for criticism.

But to-day she had not had a letter from Gregory and several unpleasant things broke in upon her absorbed happiness. She missed his letter which she usually went home at noon to get. In the afternoon as she sat at her desk working and trying to feel that she could fill up the time until she went home that night to see if there was a



letter, Bob and Allison Brownley came in with another young girl. They were as resplendent as usual and Freda judged that they were collecting for some fashionable charity, from their intrusion with pencils and notebooks. She had seen women invade these offices almost every day for some such reason but it was her first encounter with Bob since that night on which she had left her house. To her horror she found herself flushing, and hoping that Barbara would not notice her and that thought enraged her so that she raised her head and looked full at the girls coming towards Mr. Flandon's office, evidently referred to her.

She expected some embarrassment in Barbara and instead met a glance of insolence and surprise. She looked at Allie but Allie looked away and left it to Barbara.

"Can I take your message?" asked Freda with a little hauteur.

"We prefer to see Mr. Flandon personally," said Barbara, and went by. It was in Freda's mind to stop them but Barbara was swift. Freda could hear Mr. Flandon's voice greeting her and judged it was too late to do anything. She sat down at her desk frowningly and was further surprised when the door opened very shortly and the girls went out. They, especially Barbara, had heads unpleasantly held, angrily tilted. The buzzer sounded for Freda.

She found her employer sitting at his desk looking as angry as his departing guests.

"Sit down a moment, Miss Thorstad, will you?"

She did as he told her. It was evident that he had something important and difficult to say. She watched him. He looked nervous, tired too, she thought.

"That young lady made some unpleasant remarks about you and I asked her to leave the office," he said.



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"Oh—I'm sorry," answered Freda. "She's been abominable, Mr. Flandon. But it's too bad you should have been involved."

"Don't let that bother you," said Gage grimly; "it's of no consequence. But I wonder if you ought to let her be quite so broadcast in her remarks. It could be stopped."

"It doesn't matter—truly it doesn't. Let her say what she pleases. If any one wants to know the truth of the matter I always can tell it, you see."

"Would you think it infernal impudence if I asked you what the truth was?"

She hesitated and then laughed a little.

"You know the funny thing is that I had almost completely forgotten the whole business. It seemed important at the time but it was really trivial. Except for the fact that it opened up other things to me. Of course I'll tell you, if you want to know."

She did tell him in outline, stressing the fact of the misunderstanding all around, on the whole, dealing rather gently with Barbara, now that anger had gone out of her.

"I had made rather a fool of myself you see," she finished.

He looked at her as if waiting for her to go on.

"That's all."

"I see. She—well—." He let that pass. "Now ordinarily it is easy to say that gossip and slander don't make any difference to a high minded person. I think you are high minded. I do feel however that she has made this incident a basis for a kind of slander that is dangerous. Her accusations against you are, from what I hear, absolutely libelous. It wouldn't take ten minutes to shut her mouth if I could talk to her. But I want you to fully refute her specific attacks."

"I know. I imagine she might say almost anything."

"Well, then, you have never stayed at the Roadside Inn, have you?"

To his amazement the face of the girl in front of him changed. She had been calm and half smiling. Now astonishment, consciousness, and something like panic showed in her eyes, her suddenly taut body.

"Does she say that? How did she know?" There was a little moan of dismay in Freda's answer.

Gage's face grew stern. He sat looking at the girl across from him, whose eyes were closed as if in pain.

"To lay her hands on that," said Freda, under her breath.

"I don't understand you," said Gage rather curtly.

She lifted her face.

"It hurts to have any one know that—but for her to know it most of all."

"Such things are usually public knowledge sooner or later, my dear young lady. Clandestine—"

"Don't say that," cried Freda, her voice rising, "don't use that word."

And then as if some gate had been opened her words poured out. "Can't you understand something being too beautiful to be anything except secret? It was something I couldn't have let even those who love me know about. And to have her ugly devastating hands on it! It soils it. I feel her finger marks all over me. It was mine and she's stolen it."

Her head went down on her arms on the desk in front of her. Gage watched her with curiosity, embarrassment and pity. To his mind this love affair was a shady business but she didn't see it so. That was evident. Her abandonment touched a chord of sympathy in him. He knew how she was being rent by pain.

"My dear girl," he told her, more gently, "I'm afraid you've been very unwise."



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"No—not unwise." She raised her head and smiled unsteadily. "I've been quite wise. It's just bad luck—that's all."

"Could you tell me about it?"

She got up and walked to the window, evidently trying to compose herself. "It's nothing that matters to any one but me. And I suppose you are thinking things that, even if they don't matter, had better be set straight. For perhaps you think they matter. There's nothing that I've done that I shouldn't have done. I was there at that Inn—with—with my husband. It was just that we wanted—he even more than I at first until I learned why—to keep that little bit of life for ourselves. We didn't want people to know—we didn't want to share with any one except each other. I know you won't understand but there's nothing to condemn except that we had our own way of—caring."

"But I do understand," answered Gage, "and I'm glad you told me. I do most entirely understand. Because I've felt that way. Is your husband here?"

"He's gone," said Freda, "but he'll come back. You see I married Gregory Macmillan."

A memory of that slim, gaunt young poet came to Gage. Yes, this was how he would do it. And how perfect they were—how beautiful it all was.

"Mr. Flandon," said Freda, "let them say what they please about me. Let them talk—they don't know about Gregory—or do they?"

"No—they don't."

"Then don't tell them, will you? Don't tell any one. I don't care what they say now if they don't lay their hands on the truth. I can't bear to have the truth in their mouths. Please—what do I care what any one says? I don't know any one. I never see those people. He will be back and we'll go away and they'll forget me."

She was very beautiful as she pleaded with him, eyes fresh from their tears, her face full of resolution.

"It's all right, my dear," said Gage, "no one shall know. You are right. Keep your memories to yourself. What they say doesn't matter."

He was standing by her at the window now, looking down at her with a tenderness that was unmistakable. It was unfortunate that at that moment Mr. Sable entered without notice.

## II

There was an argument that night. Sable had forced it. He had said that Gage had to "cut it out in his own office."

Gage had asked him what he meant by cutting it out and his partner said that he definitely meant getting that girl out of the office at once.

"And my advice to you is to keep away from her after she is out."

The upshot was that Gage had refused. He had simply said that there was no reason why he should turn out a useful employee simply because any one disliked her or thought evilly of her. Miss Thorstad was extremely useful to him and there was nothing further to say. At which Sable had snorted in disdain.

But, seeing Gage's stubbornness he had possibly guessed at what might be the depth of it and grown milder.

"It's a difficult business for me, Gage," he said, "but I've got to go through with it. She must leave the office. We can't afford scandal."

"Suppose I won't discharge her?"

"I'm not supposing any such nonsense. You aren't going to act that way unless you're crazy."

"But if I did?"



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Sable looked at him.

"It means a smash probably. Don't let's talk foolishness. You know you've got too much tied up in this business to let it go. You couldn't afford to say you smashed up your business for a woman. That's not the way things are done. I can't insist on your giving up the girl but I can ask you to remove the scandal from an office in which not alone your name is involved."

"Such rotten minds," thought Gage, almost without anger. He was feeling curiously clear and light and deft. He had felt that way ever since he had found how Freda felt. Something had been strengthened in his own philosophy by her simple refusal to share her secret with every one. She put other things higher than the opinion of gossip. So must he.

They let the thing ride for a few days. Gage thought of nothing else and found himself dreaming a great deal when he should have been working, according to Sable. He also found that Helen was becoming almost antipathetic to him. She was to make the seconding speech for one of the candidates at Chicago and was busy with its preparation. There were conferences constantly, and she had allowed a picture of herself with her children to be syndicated. Gage found it before him everywhere and it enraged him. He felt it on his raw mind as an advertisement of the result of their love, as a dragging into publicity of the last bond between them.

"I feel like the husband of a moving picture actress," he told her, viciously, one day.

She said what she had never meant to say. She was tired and full of worrying and important matters. Gage and his brooding seemed childish and morbid. And she had her own secret grievance.

"From what I hear of your escapades at the Roadside Inn you act like the husband of one," she retorted.

She had not meant to say that. But when the gossip about Freda had reached her there had come an ugly coupling in her mind of that gossip and Gage's interest in the girl. During that very week-end Gage had been absent from the city—on political business—he had said vaguely. Yet she had tried to control her suspicions, convince herself that there was no cause for investigation or accusation. This flare of hers was unexpected and unguarded—dangerous too.

A shudder of misery shot through both of them at their own coarseness. But they were launched. And it was clear to Gage that in some way or other not only Sable but Helen had thought him involved with Freda. It did not make him particularly angry. He rather courted the injustice of the suspicion because it justified him in his own position. This was where this business of Helen's had landed them then. Alienated, loveless, suspicious—this was the natural outcome of the whole thing. Minds running on sex all the time—that was what happened to these women—yet without delicacy, without reserve. So she thought he was like that, did she? She was thinking that sort of viciousness while he'd been trying to protect her even from himself. What was the use of it all?

"I don't know what you hear of my escapades as you call them," he answered. "Possibly you might inform me?"

She was sick with shame at her own impulse but perhaps it had been at the bottom of her mind corroding it more than she knew.

"I didn't mean to say that, Gage."

"You must have meant something."

He was insistent, brutal. He would have the truth out of her. He wanted the inside of her mind, to torture himself with it if he could. He wanted it over with.



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"Not to-night, Gage. I'm tired. Let's talk over some of these things when we are both fresh. I—I apologize."

She moved towards the door of the living-room on her way upstairs. But Gage caught her hand. He stood looking down at her and as she met his eyes she saw that his face was almost strange. His eyes looked queer. They were brutal, excited, strange glints. His mouth seemed to hang loose and heavy.

"Not to-night, Gage," she repeated. In her voice was a droop of weariness that was unmistakable.

"Why not to-night? Because you want to save yourself fresh for your public to-morrow? You don't want to be bothered with a husband and his annoyances?"

"Not to-night because you aren't in the right mood."

He still held her hand.

"But suppose I want to go into it to-night. There'll be no better time. Day after to-morrow my wife goes to the National Convention to dazzle the American public. Suppose she sets her house in order first. Every good politician does that, Helen."

"There's a devil in you, Gage, isn't there?"

"A hundred, and every one bred by you. Tell me, what you were referring to as my escapades? Tell me."

He shook her a little. She felt a hairpin loosened and the indignity suddenly made her furious.

"Let me go."

"I will not let you go. I want you to tell me."

"I'll tell you," she said bitterly, her words coming as if anger pushed them out. "Heaven knows I've tried to conceal it even from myself. But your viciousness shows you've got a rotten conscience. When you took that Thorstad girl into your office I wondered why—and then after I told you she'd been seen at that place with a man, your silly defence of her might have told me what was the situation. You talk of her—all the time—all the



time. You were away that week-end. Where were you if you weren't with her?"

He let her go then. She had said it. It was said, as he had wanted it said. He felt triumphant. And he would give her no satisfaction. He would hurt her—and hurt her.

She went on in a tumbled burst of words.

"I don't blame the girl, though she's a little fool. But I won't stand having her let in for that sort of thing."

"Why not?" asked Gage, lighting a cigarette. "Isn't it a perfectly proper thing for a modern woman to choose her lovers where she will?"

Helen felt herself grow dizzy, not at his question but at the admission it made. She drew herself up and Gage wondered at her beauty with a hot surge of desire even while he wanted to torture her more. It was such a relief to have found a weapon.

"Come," he went on, "we won't discuss that young lady. There's not a thing in the world against her. If you have been bending your ear to the ground and heard a lot of rotten gossip I'm not responsible. If the people who talk about her had half her quality—"

"I warn you, Gage, you're going to pieces," interrupted Helen. "I can't stop you if you're determined to ruin yourself. But you've acted like a pettish child for months about the fact that I wanted to do some work you didn't approve of, apparently you've run off and got mixed up with this girl, you've been drinking far too much—you had whisky before breakfast this morning—it's beginning to tell on you."

"I miss you, Helen," said Gage with a kind of sinister sarcasm.

She shivered.

"I'm going upstairs."

"We're not through."



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"Yes, we are."

"Aren't you going to divorce me—or would that hurt your career?"

"You're not yourself, Gage," said Helen. She had regained a loose hold on herself. "I'd sooner not talk to you any more to-night."

He flattened the end of his lighted cigarette and pulled the chain of the table light.

"Then we'll talk upstairs."

"Not to-night."

"Yes, we will, Helen. I'm lonely for you." He came to where she stood. "Come along, my dear."

There was not a tone in his voice that Helen could recognize. A kind of ugly caress—she shuddered.

He put his arm around her shoulders.

"Gage—you mustn't touch me like this."

He laughed at her.

"It's quite the new way, as I understand it, my dear, isn't it? Nature—openness—no false modesties, no false sentiments. After all we are married—or to be more modern, we're openly living together. The pictures in the paper prove it. There's no use being silly. You've had your way a lot lately—now how about mine?"

He pulled her close to him and pushing back her head sought her lips roughly, as if he were dying of thirst and cared little what healthy or unhealthy drink he had found.

### III

"You know," said Cele Nesbitt to Freda, "I think Mr. Flandon acts kind of queer, don't you?"

"He's tired, probably," she told Cele.

"Doesn't look tired. He seems so excited. I thought he and old Sable must be having a row. I went into Sable's office with some papers to-day and there they were

glowering at each other and mum as oysters all the time I was in the room. They don't stop talking business when I'm around."

"Well, don't worry about them," answered Freda, "Mr. Flandon is the kindest person I know and there's something wrong with people who can't agree with him."

"Hate him, don't you?" Cele teased her. "Isn't it a pity he's married. And such a stunning wife and children. Did you see her picture on Sunday? She ought to be in the movies instead of politics with that hair."

Except for Margaret Freda saw only one other person at very close range. That was Gage's stenographer, Cecilla Nesbitt, commonly known as Cele. Cele was a joyous soul who had taken a liking to Freda and shortly invited her to come home for dinner. Freda had gone and been made happy and intimate at once. There were all the traces of the cottage that the Nesbitts had before they moved to St. Pierre—old rattan rocking chairs and scroll topped beds. Over everything, invading everything was the Church. There was a little holy water font inside the door, there were pictures and holy cards framed and unframed everywhere, crucifixes over the beds, holy pictures in the bureau frames and rosaries on the bed posts. To Freda in her sparsely religious home, God had been a matter of church on Sunday and not much more than that except a Bible for reference and a general astronomical warder at the enormity of God's achievements. This difference—this delightful easy intimacy with God was all fascinating. This was the comfort of religion, religion by your bedside and at your table. She expanded under it. There was a plenitude of Nesbitts, sleeping rather thickly in the four bedrooms—two brothers, young men of twenty or thereabouts—there was Cele after them and then two younger girls of ten and



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thirteen and stepping rapidly downward the twins of nine, Mrs. Nesbitt having finished her family with a climax, especially as the twins were boys and made up for being altar boys on Sunday by being far from holy on all other occasions. Still their serving of Mass endowed them in the eyes of Mrs. Nesbitt with peculiar virtues. She had a gently conciliatory Irish way towards her sons rather different from her tone to her daughters. Freda contrasted it with some amusement with the cold classicism of Margaret's attitude. To Mrs. Nesbitt they were obviously slightly inferior in the sight of God and man, being female, to be cherished indeed, frail perhaps, and yet not made in the exact image of the Creator.

They were headed for the Nesbitt flat. Freda had no letter from Gregory, had had none for two days and her heart felt as if it were thickening and sinking. She would not let it be so. She set to work to make herself interested. She would not mope. It was not in her to mope. But she did not know where Gregory was, for his last letter had said he was waiting advice from the bureau—one of his talks having been cancelled—and that he didn't know where he would go now. It did not make her worried or nervous but she had been drugging her emotions with his letters and the sudden deprivation hurt her cruelly. So she was going home with Cele to forget it.

They got on the street car and hung from their straps with the nonchalance of working girls who have no hopes or wishes that men will give up their seats to them, their attitude strangely different from that of some of the women, obviously middle class housewives, who commandeered seats with searching, disapproving, nagging eyes. Freda loved this time of day—the sense of being with people all going to their places of living, fraught with mystery and possibility. Her spirits rose. She was

not thinking sadly of Gregory. She thought of how her intimate thought and knowledge of him reached out, over her unfamiliarity with these others, touching him wherever he was, in some place unknown to her. The thought put new vigor into her loneliness.

It was an oppressively hot evening for June. They climbed the three flights to the Nesbitt flat with diminishing energy and Cele sank on one of the living-room chairs in exhaustion as she went in.

"Hot as hell," she breathed. "Let's sit down a minute before we wash, Freda."

Freda took off her hat and brushed her hair back with her hand.

"Pretty hot all right. Bad weather for dispositions."

"My idea of this kind of weather is that it's preparation for the hereafter."

Mrs. Nesbitt opened the door to the kitchen and hot heavy smells from the cooking food came through to the girls. But Mrs. Nesbitt herself, mopping great hanging drops of sweat from her forehead, was serene enough. She shook hands with Freda with vast smiling cordiality.

"You're as cool looking as the dawn," she said to her. "Are you tired, dear?"

"Not a bit."

"There's a little droop to your eyes, dear. I thought maybe it was bad news now."

Freda had a sudden impulse to confidence, a leap of the mind towards it. But she drew back.

"No—not bad news at all."

"Your mother and father's well?"

"My mother is coming to see me for a few days, I think. She's going to Chicago for the Convention for the clubs and she'll come back this way to see me."

"Now, isn't that the blessing for you," said Mrs. Nesbitt rejoicingly.

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The family streamed in, the boys from their work and the twins from school. Last came Mr. Nesbitt, his tin lunch pail in his hand, his feet dragging with weariness. They talked of the heat, all of them, making it even more oppressive than it was by their inability to escape the thought of it. And Mrs. Nesbitt who knew nothing of salads and iced tea, or such hot weather reliefs stirred the flour for her gravy and set the steaming pot roast before her husband. They ate heavily. Freda tried to keep her mind on what she was doing. She talked to the boys and let Mrs. Nesbitt press more food on her unwilling appetite. It was very unwilling. She did not want to eat. She wanted to sit down and close her eyes and forget food and heat and everything else—except Gregory.

Vaguely she was aware of Mr. Nesbitt talking.

"It was in the paper and no more stir made of it than if a stray dog was run over by an automobile—shot down they were, martyrs to Ireland." His voice was oratorical, funereal, heavy with resentment.

"Who?" asked Freda.

"Fine young Irishmen with the grace of God in their hearts shot down by the hired wastrels of the Tyrants. Gentlemen and patriots."

"What an outrage it is," she answered.

He burst into invective at her sympathy, rolling his mighty syllabled words in denunciation, and his family sat around and listened in agreement yet in amusement.

"Come now, pop, you'll be going back, if you get as hot under your shirt as all that," said Mike.

"It's too hot for excitement, pa," Mrs. Nesbitt contributed equably. "Pass him the mustard, do you, Cele."

"I'll show you a true account of it in *The Irish News*," said Mr. Nesbitt, to Freda, ignoring his family.

He wiped his mouth noisily and abandoned the table,

coming back to press into Freda's hands his *Irish News*, a little out of fold with much handling.

"The city papers tell you nothing but lies," he said, "read this."

To please him, Freda read. She read the account of the shooting of three young men poets and patriots, whose names struck her as familiar. And then she read:

"These young martyrs were part of the group who banded together for restoration of the Gaelic tongue to Ireland. They with Seumas, McDermitt and Gregory Macmillan now on tour in this country—"

She read it again. It gave her a sense of wonder to come on his name here, his name so secretly dear, in this cold print. And then came more than that. This was Gregory—her Gregory who might have been killed too if he had been there—who might be killed when he returned to Ireland. She didn't know where he was. Perhaps—perhaps he had heard of this and gone back. Perhaps he had forgotten, forgotten about her—about them. This was so big—

She had to take her thought away from the presence of all these people. She wanted to con it over—she must get away. Suddenly she stood up and the heat and distaste for food—the accurate sight of a piece of brown stringy meat, embedded in lifeless gravy, sickened her. She pressed her hand before her eyes and swayed a little.

Mrs. Nesbitt jumped up with Cele.

"She's sick—poor dear. The heat now has quite overcome her."

They helped her into the least hot of the little bedrooms and she found herself very sick—nauseated—chilled even while she was conscious of the heat that oppressed while it did not warm her. The family was all astir. Mr. Nesbitt underwent censure for having bothered her. But when Freda, apologetic and recovered,



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went home on Mike's arm, getting the first breath of air which came as a relief to the hot city, Mrs. Nesbitt came into the room where Cele hung half out of the window trying to catch the breeze.

"Sick she was, poor thing."

"Rotten heat got her. She's not used to working, either, I think. She felt a lot better. Her stomach got upset too."

Mrs. Nesbitt pressed her lips together.

"It was a funny way she was taken. If she was a married woman I should have said the cause was not the heat."

"Huh?" said Cele, pulling herself in. "What's that you mean?"

"I mean nothing," said Mrs. Nesbitt. "Nothing at all. Only I would have you always be sure to make sure your friends are good girls, my darlin'. Mind ye, I say nothing against the young lady. But she's a pretty and dangerous face and she's away from her home where by rights should every girl be."



## CHAPTER XV.

### THE CONVENTION

#### I

**T**HE Convention gathered. It was an event signal enough to make an impress even on the great city. Convention Week was recognized by every one, hotel men, shop keepers, railroad men, newspapers, pickpockets, police, students in the great universities at the city's gates, and the great subordinate multitude which read the newspapers and accepted the ruling of politics or commerce, as to which days should be held apart—Labor Day, Mother's Day, Convention Week.

The streets were hung with banners, great, swinging canvas pieces of propaganda, bearing crude likenesses of candidates and still cruder catchwords supposed to represent their opinions or those of their opinions likely to excite popular pleasure. In the hotel lobbies men swarmed. Desk clerks, sated with patronage, gave smiling and condescending negations to those who applied for rooms. The girls at the cigar counters and newspaper stands worked steadily, throwing back saucy rejoinders to the occasional impudences of the men.

It was mostly a gathering of men, a smoky, hot, sweating collection of men who had a certain kind of training in this game of conventions and politics. They flung themselves into their parts, gossiping, joking, occasionally forceful, immensely knowing. No one of them was there who did not feel himself a commissioned prophet—perhaps not as to ultimate but as to tendencies anyhow. They spoke the great names with a jesting

respect, the lesser ones with camaraderie or a fillip of scorn—but for any suggestion of political idealists or of women they had a smile. They admitted the fact that women had been put in the show but it wasn't going to change the show any. They knew.

Here and there in the hotels were groups of women, well dressed for the most part, some of them handsome, all of them more alert, less careless than the men—talking wisely too but with more imagination, with a kind of excited doubt as to the outcome, and despite themselves showing a delighted naïveté in their bearing towards the whole event. That was on the first day before the heat had really lowered over the city.

Helen and Margaret had been well provided for. They had long before engaged rooms in one of the most comfortable hotels where previous patronage made Helen able to choose her accommodations. Gage who had come after all, had no reservations anywhere and apparently no particular worry about them. He could always get in somewhere and he had no intention of staying at the same hotel with Helen and Margaret. He breakfasted with them on the train and enjoyed it in spite of himself, enjoyed being able to watch Helen and to bait Margaret with political pessimism and a jocular scorn as to the effect of women on the Convention. When they arrived he saw them to their hotel and left Helen to her "glory" he said, a little mockingly.

"It's hot," he said. "Don't try to make over the whole Party to-day, my dear."

"I won't," said Helen. Her eyes met his. For thirty-six hours every glance, every gesture towards him had been unreal, mechanically controlled. She was not apparently angry—nor cold. It was rather as if when she spoke to him she had no feeling. Deep in himself, Gage was frightened. He guessed the fact that anger is often

a denial of loss of illusion and that in Helen's utter lack of response there was something deadly, ominous. A glimmer of respect for her work came as he first saw her, the morning after their catastrophic night, not moping or storming, but studying notes for her seconding speech. But the glimmer faded. It was because she really didn't care. Shallow feelings, easy to suppress, he told himself. She had probably told Margaret about the whole thing and Margaret had tipped her off as to how to behave. That thought struck him and made him curdle with anger again.

If it had not been for Helen there was no doubt that he would have regarded the women with a kind of tolerance and with some speculation regarding their usefulness. There was a chance that they might be useful. But the intensity of his feelings, starting from his invaded love for his wife, from that sense of exterior influences over which he had no control and which he did not trust coming into the privacy of their relations, mauling those delicacies by weighing, appraising emotions and loyalties, chipping off a bit here and a bit there, bargaining, discussing, leaving a great imprint of self-consciousness of the whole, had spoiled all that. Gage was confused. He was in revolt against a hundred, a thousand things, and that he was not quite sure of the justice of his revolt made it none the easier for him.

He was in the lobby of the Congress Hotel, turning away from the cigar counter, alone for the minute, when he felt a touch on his arm and turned to see Mrs. Thorstad. She was dressed in a neat dark suit and a tan sailor hat, rimmed precisely with white daisies, looking very competent and attractive.

"How do you do, Mr. Flandon?" she asked.

He gazed down at her, smiling. She amused him and intrigued him. When he watched Mrs. Thorstad he felt convinced that all his protest against the progress of

women was somehow justified. It was his quarrel with Margaret and the foundation of his dislike of her that he could not get the same feeling with her and had to build it up with anger.

"I hope you're well," he answered, as he shook hands with her.

"I want to thank you for all your kindness to Freda. You've given her a great opportunity to find herself."

Word slinging, thought Gage. What did she mean by "finding herself?"

"She's a great addition to my office force." He wondered what this little person would say if she knew, as she so obviously did not, of the tumultuous marriage of her daughter, of the ugly stream of gossip that was pouring about her feet.

"I have the greatest respect for the woman in business," went on Mrs. Thorstad. "Of course I confess I had hoped that Freda would interest herself in something possibly a little more humanitarian, something perhaps a little more idealistic—oh, I don't mean to decry the law, Mr. Flandon, but we can't help feeling that the business world lacks certain great ideals—"

Gage grinned, looking like a great humorous puppy.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to excuse me, if you will. I see a man over there I must speak to."

Mrs. Thorstad smiled in acquiescence, leaving her chair herself. She sent a dutiful postal to Mr. Thorstad and went out on the Avenue in front of the hotel. She had calls to make. The galling sense of the fact that her impress on the Convention must be a slight one was undoubtedly under her gallant, moral little smile. To be sure she had come to the Convention, she had a seat reserved, she was, as she always would be, taking what she could get, but if Margaret Duffield had not come West it might have been more.

None the less she called on Miss Duffield and Mrs.

Flandon. She found them at their hotel where congregated a brilliant circle. Harriet Thompson, renowned from coast to coast as a leader of women, was there. She was a rather plain woman of forty-five, lean faced with good brown eyes and a rather disconcerting way of seeming to leap at you intimately to discover what sort of person you were. And there were Grace Hawlett, the novelist, and the wives and sisters of famous politicians. It was a gay, knowledgeable group. Most of the women knew Margaret and were instantly attracted by Helen's beauty and charm of manner. Margaret introduced Mrs. Thorstad as "one of the best woman organizers in the Middle West," and they were all cordial. Mrs. Thompson took the Mohawk leader aside for a little talk. It was astonishing how much Mrs. Thompson knew about the situation in St. Pierre—how she had her finger on the strength of the women and the strength of the organization in the entire state. She put rapid questions to Mrs. Thorstad and checked her a little abruptly in the middle of some generalities.

"How did you all like Miss Duffield?" she asked.

"Very much indeed," answered Mrs. Thorstad, with the slightest pursing of lips. The keen brown eyes looked at her for a minute. It was not the answer usually made to a question about Margaret Duffield.

Mrs. Thorstad departed to find her own kind. She knew she was not at home in that particular group which while it awed her by its sparkle of mind and personality, yet left her resentful, and she went on the round of her further calls. She found women with petty lobbying to do, with little reputations which they wished to secure, airing their platitudes and generalities to each other in heavy agreement, talking of the new day and denouncing the vagaries of modernity with a fervor that was half jealous, half fearful.

Harriet Thompson looked at Margaret after Mrs. Thorstad had left them. She always liked to look at Margaret. The serenity in her calm face, the touch of austerity which kept it from becoming placid, pleased her. She crossed to where she was sitting.

"What did you do to that little person, Margaret?"

"I? I didn't do anything. She rather wanted to be delegate at large in Helen's place, I think. Don't speak of it to Helen. I told Helen there was no one else even willing to do it."

"Your Mrs. Flandon is a lovely person."

She wondered, as she said that, at the soft flush of enthusiasm which came over Margaret's face.

"Isn't she? She's just what you want, too. I hope she keeps interested."

"Isn't she very much interested?"

"Yes—but it's not too easy for her. Her husband's rather opposed—makes it difficult."

"Odd that a woman like that should be married to a reactionary."

"He isn't at all an ordinary reactionary," said Margaret. "He's a politician, without any illusions. Hates all the publicity she gets. I think he wants her to himself you see—most awfully in love."

"He'll never have her to himself if she gets into this game. She's the sort of woman, from the little I've seen of her that we need. Brains and personality—not a wild woman or an old fashioned suffragist. Did she reconcile the husband?"

"Not a bit. He's here. You ought to meet him. But better carry a weapon."

"He might be rather interesting."

"He is all of that."

"After all, Margaret, it is rather hard on some of these men. I've seen it before. They suddenly have so little

of their wives to themselves. It affects them like the income tax. They hate to give up so large a share of their property."

"To a government they distrust. That's it with Gage. He doesn't mind Helen doing any amount of music. But he hates all kinds and forms of modern feminism. Thinks it's shameless and corrupting."

"It is pretty shameless and sometimes a little corrupting. There's a lot in the man's point of view that you never saw, Margaret. They're fighting for themselves of course but they're fighting for the sex too. It's all right, too. Man is, I sometimes think, the natural preserver of sex. Women get along very well without it, or with enough of it to decently populate the earth. But men are the real sentimentalists. A woman's ruthless when she begins to houseclean her sentiments. A man never likes to throw anything away, you know, according to the tradition. He doesn't like to throw away sex. He's used it badly, spotted it up and all that—in his lucid moments he'll even admit it. But none the less it's very often the one thing which can excite his tenderness and reverence and when he sees us invade the home, as he says, it isn't that he's afraid the dishes won't get washed. He says that, but what he is afraid of is that we'll find the secret places of his sentiment and ravish them. I'm awfully sorry for some of the men. They're going through a lot just now. They seem to feel so left out, under all their loud jocosity and foolish talk—you know," she ended a little weakly.

"I know. I've been sorry for Gage myself. Terribly sorry for him. But I don't see how one can make concessions. What I'm afraid of is that in his bitterness he'll break Helen down. And she might give in but she'd never forgive him now."

"You've done some speedy work, haven't you?"



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Smashed up homes and everything. What happened to your own pet Sinn Feiner?"

"He's lecturing somewhere or other."

"Is that all off?"

"It never was on."

"You couldn't get absorbed in his enthusiasm because you've got one of your own, haven't you?"

"I have yours."

Mrs. Thompson patted her affectionately on the arm. Her contacts were all warm and intimate. With men and women alike, she seemed to get inside their minds and look out on the world as they saw it.

"You're a dear girl," she told her, "but you must remember that humanity is a bigger thing even than feminism, Margaret. Be a little more tender towards the poor men. After all, they can't all be transported."

All afternoon the crowds swelled. In the evening the great hotel dining-rooms were filled with people who represented almost everything—power, wealth, notoriety, ambition. Headquarters were established. Newspaper men idled to and fro, joking, prophesying, gossiping. Underneath the fatuousness of much of the pretense that this was a great popular meeting, most of the people knew that the rules were already laid down and things would take their course—must take their course. And yet there was a certain amount of fair speculation as to whether in some way the great leaders might not be outwitted after all—whether some new element might not show sudden strength, whether the unorganized, half formulated hopes and ideals of millions of ordinary people might this time put themselves across and lead instead of follow. The Convention, like the world, was attuned to surprises, revolts, inexplicable overturnings.

Helen was more than excited. A little less than two days ago she had felt that she could not go on with this—



that the personal agony had to be fought out first. To her amazement she found that Margaret had been right. Helen had always agreed with her that women were really not dependent on emotion but that had been because Margaret's contention seemed reasonable and to take the other side hardly worthy. An inner feeling had persisted that after all Margaret was unmarried and didn't—couldn't know the strength of the emotional pull. But now she found herself breaking through personal emotional wreckage to impersonal interest—or if not impersonal interest at least interest in which sex played no part. She had at first kept up the signs of control because she must. Now she no longer needed the signs. She thought of Gage almost dispassionately. Now and then the tragedy of the ruined feeling between them shook her violently. But she could see their situation spread out before her. She could see it in relation to the children, to other work. She could see where things must be stopped in that they did not improve. And most of the time she hardly thought of Gage at all. She was responding to all the excitement and interest and admiration around her. She felt part of a great organization about to act in ways which would affect the world. The great sensibility of her woman's imagination, undulled by much experience in the direction of things beyond her contact, was played upon by a vision of great power which she might help direct.

For the first time she understood what Margaret meant by the freedom of women and why she was not content with the formal letting down of the gates. She understood what some of the others meant when they talked of the easy contemporary victories as obscuring the real things which women needed.

The best of them did not talk the lingo of the "new day." They knew that any day was not new long enough

to get used to its title. They talked of adjustment of contemporary circumstances to an evolution as old as that of civilization, as old as that of man—merged with male development and yet distinct from it again. They avoided catch words and the flattery which was sprinkled so thickly, avoided it not pedantically but with humorous knowledge of its purpose.

They dined with Mrs. Thompson and three other women and held a kind of informal court afterwards in one of the parlors of the hotel. Every notable man who came into the hotel seemed to want a word with Mrs. Thompson. She had a way with them that they all liked, a kind of keen camaraderie, especially effective in a woman who, like Mrs. Thompson, could never be accused of trying out any arts of sex attraction. They liked her company and her brisk tongue and there was added interest in finding such company in a woman. Helen met the Senators—the men whose names the party conjured with and handled them as she handled most people—skillfully.

It was a little after nine when Helen saw Gage at the end of the room. She had been talking with a gray haired, affable Senator who was telling her what a beneficial influence the women were to have on the Convention and she was excited, amused and sparkling. She was wearing a dinner dress of black lace that Gage had always liked and as she caught his eyes on her that was the first thought which flashed through her mind. It was followed by a quick appraisal of Gage himself. He was looking a little untidy and showing clearly the signs of recent strain and worry.

He did not make his way to her at once. He stopped to talk casually to some men whom he knew. Helen thought suddenly that Gage was not a big man politically. He did not have nearly as much prestige as Mrs.

Thompson of course, not nearly as much strength as she herself might have—. She saw Margaret introducing him to Mrs. Thompson. His manners were bad. He had none of the easy pleasant way with which the other men had come up to her. He must be making an extremely bad impression. It humiliated her somewhat. They were still too close for her not to feel that.

She joined the group where were Gage and Mrs. Thompson and Margaret.

"Have you had a good day, Gage? I called up the house and the children are fine. Not a trace of their colds, Esther said."

He nodded gravely. Their eyes met, denying any intimacies of exchange, coldly, a little cruelly.

"I hear your wife is to make the prize seconding speech to-morrow, Mr. Flandon," said Harriet Thompson, bending towards him.

"I have no doubt of it," said Gage.

"Do your views agree?" asked the older woman lightly.

"Very seldom," answered Gage. He had not made it light. It was like the flick of a whip.

Margaret interposed.

"Gage doesn't believe in women's progress, Harriet—don't get him started, please."

"I wish he would get started. There are plenty of times when I think we're all talking balderdash and it would be a relief to hear some one give testimony against us. What is the matter with women, Mr. Flandon?"

Gage's tired, half-haunted eyes looked at her as if he suspected mockery but he found none.

"According to most belief, there is nothing the matter with them. They are supremely successful. They've got what they wanted. If they don't like the taste of their little mess of pottage as they eat it, it will be unfortunate."

"You don't think they will like it?"

"I may be mistaken. It may suit their taste."

"I'm afraid it won't but it's the best food we're able to provide so far. Perhaps we've overpaid for it."

"You have."

He stopped, abruptly conscious of being drawn into discussion in public. Margaret and Helen had been listening to the brief dialogue, and he stiffened to the sense of their presence.

"I can't stay, Helen—I've an appointment. Is there anything I can do?"

She walked with him to the end of the room, impelled by a desire to preserve what she could of appearances but more by an unexpected pain at having him leave her. She did not want him to stay—she was clear about that, but she hated to have him go away in that lonely fashion. The gentleness that welled up only lasted for a moment. He was ugly still. She could tell by the set of his lips. It brought back her terribly painful memories.

"Good night, Gage."

That was all. Towards morning Gage went to bed. He had been drinking other people's whisky and he was ill enough to suspect it had not been good stuff.

## II

He did not go to the great Auditorium until the next afternoon. It took some time to get himself into shape. The heat had begun, heat which settled thickly on the city for three days and played its own part in making possible agreements and compromises. By noon the smart look, the brisk look had gone from everything and everybody and the sticky battle with the weather had begun. Gage had met some men from his own part of the country and they entered the great hall where the banners hung limp from the ceiling and the delegates were already coming

back to their places after the noon recess. Gage did not look for his wife but after a while he saw her—as usual looking the mistress of herself. His head was hot and thick and he hated her for the fine mastery of her health and beauty. He wanted to see her in tears—prostrate—and because he knew his desire was ugly he slipped down in his own self-respect, which already was becoming such a frail reed to cling to.

All that day he did not go near her. He watched her furtively sometimes while he was in the auditorium but most of the time he spent with other men in hotel rooms which grew hotter in spite of the efforts of electric fans and all the time the whisky which he drank made his brain hot and seething with misconceptions and desires and hatreds.

By the afternoon of the second day it had settled down to an endurance meeting.

Watching the restless, heated crowd, going through the same old formalities, Gage wondered whether Helen was aware now what kind of game this was she had chosen to sit in—whether the farce of it was clear. He did not wonder clearly. It was a kind of vindictive spite which pricked a muddled brain.

He had not intend to be there when she spoke but in the end he stayed. He heard the round commonplace phrases of the man who was nominating the candidate she was working for—a good man, as Gage admitted—better caliber than most, but without a ghost of a show for nomination. He listened with irritation to the outburst of applause. Then he saw his wife before the great crowd. It seemed quite unreal.

He had not guessed her voice would carry like that. He had not known she would show up like that. She came like a breath of cool air into that heated place. In her blue linen gown and white feather hat she looked cool,

fresh, immaculate. When she spoke they listened to her and for a few minutes Gage caught himself listening eagerly. She was talking well. No nonsense. It was to the point. Just then he heard a man behind him.

"Some looker, isn't she? That's the kind of dames we ought to have in politics all right."

Blind rage swept over Gage again. He wanted to turn on the man and fight. But he did nothing of the sort, being held by a thousand inhibitions. Instead he watched his wife and as she talked he seemed to see her offering her beauty to the crowd, seemed to see in every man's face—as they watched her—amusement, desire, lust.

He heard the burst of applause when she finished, applause with real enthusiasm and at every hand clap he felt fury rising. Getting up, he found his way to the door.

If Helen had expected a tribute from him, piled on the many she received that night, she was mistaken. Men, women, newspapers all congratulated her on having put some real fire into the speeches. Her speech, printed and flashed all over the country was given its own share of praise. It was clear, forceful, new in its outlook. The women of the country had chosen a good spokesman, said the papers. But from Gage there was only a note at the hotel, saying briefly that he had thought it best to return to St. Pierre—the convention was the usual farce.

Helen twisted his note in her hands.

"So he couldn't stay away from Freda Thorstad even that long," she thought. "Well,—"

## CHAPTER XVI

### MR. SABLE STARTS SOMETHING

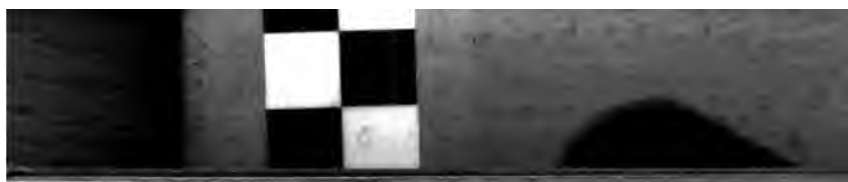
WHAT Mr. Sable had counted on was that Gage, once away for the Convention, with his wife travelling with him, would stay away for a week or so. In any case, he had taken matters rather summarily into his own hands in the case of Freda Thorstad. The presence of the girl in the office was to him like an open scandal. He knew that she had to get out of the office and the time to get her out was while Gage was away. Of course Flandon might raise trouble when he came back but there would be no scene with the girl and he could put it flatly and finally that amours had to be conducted outside of the office if at all. He was extremely correct and secure in his own position and he felt he was most delicate.

So he was at the office a little earlier than usual the morning after Gage left for the Convention. Freda was at her desk sorting the first batch of mail. She looked very neat and capable, in her white blouse open a little at the throat, her thick golden red hair pulled back smoothly from her forehead, and her head industriously bent over her letters.

"Will you come in my office for a moment, Miss Thorstad?"

Freda followed him obediently. He closed the door and, taking his arm chair, left her standing a little dubiously before him.

"Miss Thorstad," he said, "I think—er—that it will be best for you to sever your connection with this office."



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His tone, wholly disapproving, weighted with meaning, told his reasons with almost comic flatness.

Freda's brow contracted and she looked sharply at him. Then she laughed. A brazen laugh, he would have said. Truly a laugh with no more fear or care or apprehension in it than the laugh of any child who comes upon something ridiculous.

Mr. Sable frowned. She was a hussy, he thought. Might try to bulldoze him a little—he became increasingly stern.

"I have no desire to go into our reasons for this but I think it will be best for you to simply leave at once. You may find the work too heavy for you. I am sure you understand that no office of this kind could take the situation differently."

"Wouldn't it be better for me to wait until Mr. Flandon's return?" she asked.

He had feared that.

"Surely you understand that your presence here is embarrassing to Mr. Flandon," he said sharply.

If she had guessed what he suspected she might have contended. But all that he said struck her as true. She evidently was being gossiped about and if it did make it embarrassing for Mr. Flandon— Perhaps that was why he had been so over courteous, to conceal a deep embarrassment.

"Very well, Mr. Sable,"—she straightened her shoulders a little—"I shall not go on with my work here."

"Exactly." With victory so easily accomplished, Mr. Sable became different, adept at smoothing things over. "Of course when a young lady cannot typewrite, an office like this has hardly the right kind of work—"

"I know that. I told Mr. Flandon that at the start."

"Mr. Flandon being absent, I will give you a check for this week's work."



"I've done only one day's work, Mr. Sable. It is only"—she calculated—"two and a half dollars."

She took his check for that—he did not dare press the point—and left his office. Mr. Sable smoothed his little white mustache, straightened his papers with the air of having done a good day's work already, and pressed the buzzer for his own secretary.

It was only half past nine o'clock. Freda got her hat and coat from the tiny dressing-room. Her desk was in order and there was no use in fussing over it. She wanted to get out into the clean air. The pompous little lawyer's insinuations while they did not strike deep enough to insult her, made her feel soiled and dirty.

Cele followed her into the dressing-room.

"Where you going?"

"Going out to look for a job."

"He let you out?"

"That's the substance of his message."

"Well—I call that—" Cele stopped, a veil of thought coming over her eyes. "Look here," she went on, "if there's anything I can do—" She stressed the last word violently, as if the need for action pressed upon her.

"Not a thing."

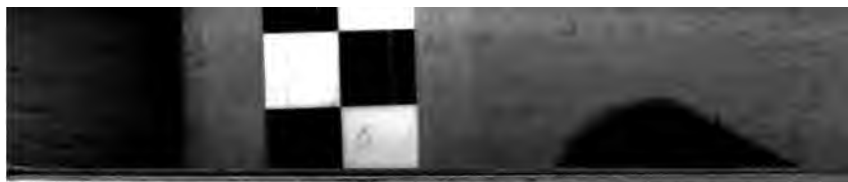
"You aren't going back to—what-you-may-call-it? The place you came from?"

"Mohawk? No—mother's coming here in a day or two. I'll wait, and look for a job."

"A job," said Cele, reflectively, "don't worry too much, will you? Say—I'll be around to see you to-night. I think it's rotten."

Freda went out, wondering if the slanderous tongues had found even Cele's ear.

But she did not linger on thoughts of her dismissal. She was sorry to leave Mr. Flandon so, but after all he



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knew and understood and the whole business was so temporary anyway. Gregory should be back any day now—and they would go away and never think of such ugliness any more. It was like her that no thought of personal justification, of setting people straight on the gossip, ever entered her head. She wanted to shake them off—that was all. She wanted to get away into light and clearness and cleanness with Gregory. And it seemed to her that merely being with Gregory would make an atmosphere like that.

She had received no letter from him in five or six days now and she missed one sadly. She needed that written touch of vigor and sweetness which set her days aflame with happiness. Especially now, with the knowledge that she was probably to bear his child. The lack of an address so she might send him that delightful information was distressing. She could have reached him through his lecture bureau but she had a dread of the letter going astray if it were not sent directly to him. Not a word or thought of resentment did she allow to penetrate her love. She kept herself free from that. It was harder to keep fear away.

She was strolling along, passing through the shopping district, now and then stopping to look idly at something in the window when she heard herself greeted. Looking up she saw Ted Smillie. He was quietly affable and there seemed no escape from speaking to him.

"How are you, Freda?" he asked calmly.

She resented his use of her name though he had come to using it before their disastrous evening.

"Quite well," she said, and looked at him evenly, waiting for him to pass her.

He did not pass. He lingered, showing in his face the return of that avid attraction which he had felt so

strongly before. She was thinner than she had been when he had seen her last and the shadows under her eyes made her face more delicate—more interesting!

"I wanted to see you again and luck's come my way. You know that I did call on you the next day at the Brownleys' and found you'd gone. I'm afraid I acted like an awful fool that night. Didn't I?"

"Worse than that."

"But it truly wasn't my fault. I had been drinking. I know I can't stand the stuff. And you made me quite lose my head."

She reflected that of course it hadn't been his fault as much as Barbara's. And not knowing or dreaming that he was the agency which had violated the privacy of those two days at the Roadside Inn, she did not persist in great resentment. She disliked him of course but she was very idle and ready for distraction.

He went on talking, eagerly.

"It's been on my mind ever since. I hated to let you think I was like that. Look here, Freda, I've got a free afternoon. Come in and have a cool drink somewhere with me—won't you?"

"I don't think so," said Freda.

"Please."

"I might hurt your reputation," she said, with a scornful little laugh. "I understand I'm causing a lot of talk among your friends."

"They always talk about every one—especially if a girl has the courage not to be conventional—"

She did not trust him in the least. Nor did she like him. It was sheer ennui which made her consent. She needed company.

They went to the tea room of a hotel, a cool place, furnished with abundant white willow and great palms. Freda had not been in such a place before and she, as ever,



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was esthetically responsive to the oasis of comfort and coolness it made in the sweltering city. Ted ordered for her—a tall glass of cool Russian tea with mint leaves and thin lettuce edged sandwiches. His solicitude for her comfort dulled the edge of whatever resentment she had towards him—she had never bothered to preserve much.

"And what are you doing? Did I hear you were working—like all modern women?"

"Working I was—like all women who need the money," she answered, "but I'm not working now."

"You're not going back to Mohawk?"

She remembered part of his proposition that she need not go back to Mohawk, made some weeks ago, glancing at him guardedly, thinking with a certain amount of interest that this was the very young man who had made suggestions which should have barred him permanently from her presence. Here she was, taking his iced tea. Things were queer. She didn't even feel particularly angry at him. There wasn't any use pretending false rigors.

"I don't know," she said, as she had said before.

"I'm glad you left the Brownleys' anyhow. Are you living with other friends?"

"No—I've a room by myself."

Obviously he liked that and the visible signs of his liking amused her.

"Can I come to see you once in a while?"

"Oh, no, indeed. I shouldn't in the least like you as a caller."

He was undisturbed.

"I'll have to make you change your mind somehow."

She shrugged her shoulders slightly, delicately, in negation.

"Do you know how much I've thought about you since that night?" he asked, bending a little closer to her.

"How much?"

"All the time."

She pushed her glass away from her.

"Don't be silly. I'm not a half-wit, Ted. I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You know quite well you're engaged to Barbara Brownley. Her mother told Miss Duffield that."

His face darkened.

"Well," he said, "I thought you were above a lot of silly conventions."

She smiled serenely. "I am."

"Then—just because a man is engaged to a woman is no reason why he should never speak to any one else."

"No—that would put a pretty high penalty on such things, wouldn't it?"

"People are getting over their old fashioned notions about such things. Men and women aren't simpletons as they used to be, you know. We're regarding these things in a modern way. More like the French," he said largely.

"The French—oh, yes," said Freda, gravely, "you mean having wives and mistresses too. I've often wondered if the French couldn't sue us for libel for the things provincial Americans think about them."

He flushed. "Are you making fun of me?"

"Gracious, no." But he knew from her laugh that she was. "Why should I make fun of you?"

She was enjoying herself. She felt so secure, so strong. It was fun to bait this temperish young man, make him scuttle about for phrases which had no effect on her at all.

"Anyway you know how I feel." He pushed aside the glasses and plates between them and bent himself over the tiny table towards her. She sat back in her chair promptly.



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"You know how I feel," he persisted, "I never cared for a girl as I've cared for you."

"Then," said Freda, with an air of great simplicity, "why not ask me to marry you?"

He threw out his hands in a theatrical gesture of despondency.

"I'm tied hand and foot. This marriage of mine has been cooked up by our families. It's all arranged for us."

"I know," said Freda wisely, "as in France."

He glanced sharply at her.

"But," said Freda, "the modern way is not to let your parents put that sort of thing over. Truly. One simply says, 'Mother—I will wed the girl of my choice.'"

"You are making fun of me."

"Well—who wouldn't?" Freda collapsed into a laugh. "Here I sit, listening to you make the funniest clandestine love in the world. You feel you've got to do it—to uphold your reputation as a—Frenchman! And if you slipped into a serious situation you'd be aghast. You don't care a thing about me and you know it."

"Ah, don't I?" He looked for a moment as if he did.

"You probably care a little about corrupting me. Now look here, Ted, please stop talking such nonsense. You can't shock me and it's pretty hard to insult me—I am a little ashamed of not being more insulted—but you probably could make me very angry by persisting in trying to involve me in petty vice. In the first place I don't like it. In the second place, if I ever went in for vice, it would be on a larger scale than you could dream of. I haven't the slightest intention of—being French! You'd better go along and make love to Bob Brownley. She'll bring some excitement into your life, I think. The reason I'm not more angry with you is that you were,

indirectly, the cause of the greatest bit of luck that ever happened to me."

"What?"

"I wouldn't dream of telling you. But I'm awfully obliged for the tea—truly. It set me up. Shall we go?"

He was not so easy to repulse. He got up and pulled his chair around to her side of the table.

"Freda," he tried to take her hand, "if I gave up Bob would you let me see you?"

"I wouldn't if you gave up the world."

She rose a little impatiently, feeling that this was going too far, and started for the door of the dining-room.

"At least you'll tell me where you live?" he pressed her. "Let me go home with you now."

"Don't you have to work in the middle of the afternoon?"

"Nobody's working much. It's too hot."

"Then go play with Barbara. I've other things to do."

Possibly it was the heat and the sense of effort which got nowhere that made Ted's face intense and angry. He saw her about to slip away again.

"You can't go like this, Freda, I've only just found you."

"You'd better let me," answered Freda, "because I see Maud Dubonnet looking at you and she knows you and obviously isn't intending to speak to me though I lunched at her house, so you see it will be hot with you when Barbara hears this."

Against his will Ted looked up and saw Maud truly, with two other girls and three young men coming into the room. They had to pass Ted and Freda as they stood there, discussing. Maud Dubonnet was the only one of the group whom Freda knew. The others all evidently knew Ted and glanced at him with some interest. Maud



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did not look at Freda. She held her head stiffly as she passed, then said something to the others which made them turn with an attempt at casualness to look at the man and girl. Ted delayed no longer. He followed Freda out.

"You see it doesn't pay to do things Barbara won't like. This will get back to her before to-morrow and she won't be pleasant."

Ted's mouth set in an rather ugly line.

"I'll manage Bob all right." He looked at Freda. Her face under the plain white hat she wore was mocking, insubordinate, fascinating. "But I want to see you again. To-night?"

"Nonsense. Good-by, Ted. Be good and make your peace with Bob."

She turned and went in the opposite direction from the one in which they had started, going into the first big department store and retiring to the ladies' waiting-room where she wrote a letter to her father, and mailed it. Then, having made sure she was rid of Ted she went home. The afternoon dragged along. She read and thought and on an impulse went out again to go to the railway station and get some time tables. She wanted to see just how far Gregory had been away from her when he last wrote.

Each time the postman approached the house there was a leap of her heart. Four times a day he came and each time he brought fresh hope. She would play tricks on herself as she went down to look in the mail box she shared with the people who rented the apartment in which she stayed. Each time she put her hand in the box she hesitated before she looked, then looked quickly as if to catch fate before it tricked her. But it would be an advertisement of a corset firm for Mrs. Miller, an envelope with unmistakable savor of a bill about it, a postcard, a

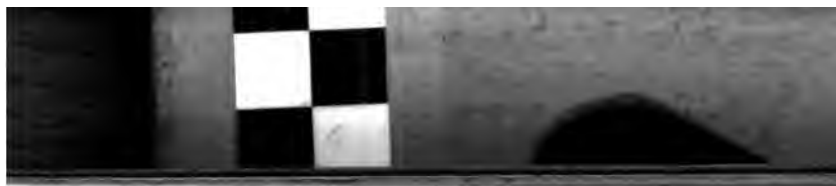


white Louisine envelope with a woman's handwriting on it. How she hated all the flatness of the Miller mail.

Each envelope she took in her hands seemed to be mischievously metamorphosed into one of these stupid envelopes which represented such dull contact with the outside world. Nothing to do but to go upstairs and read all over again the old messages of love from him—to wear her wedding ring in the privacy of her room—to make endless computations on the presumable date of her child's birth—to read with unflinching zest and yet slight nausea the rather mawkish pages of "What Every Mother Should Know" which she had shamefacedly but defiantly bought at a book shop, feeling the necessity for some practical knowledge of marriage.

The next day, breaking through her apprehension and her waiting, cutting across her vague fears, came the letter. It lay between an announcement of the opening of a new hair dressing parlor and Mr. Miller's water and light bill. How could she hope that the other white envelope would be anything more interesting? Then she turned it over and the address stared at her blackly. It was addressed to Mrs. Gregory Macmillan, in an unfamiliar hand, postmarked at the town from which Gregory had last written. Gregory always addressed her letters to Freda Thorstad to avoid any explanations to the Millers. A quick faint fear came over her. She almost crushed the letter as she flew up the stairs and with her back against her door faced the envelope again.

Then steeling her mind and her heart, presenting only outer senses to what blow it might contain, she opened it. The written words made their sense clear, like some amazingly vital story that thrilled every nerve.



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"My DEAR MRS. MACMILLAN:

I obtained your address from your husband and I am writing you to tell you that he is extremely ill. We have done our best for him and he has a nurse with him constantly but I feel that you should come to him if it is at all possible. I do not know what responsibilities of family may hold you but I think it my duty to inform you that your husband is very sick. He lectured here on the fourteenth and the next morning the proprietor of this hotel called me to attend him. I found him in the first stages of typhoid and had him removed to a hospital here which is comfortable and where we have given him every attention. At a time like this his family should be with him. I regret that I must be the agent of such distressing news.

Faithfully yours,

L. D. MERRITT, M.D."

She read it through twice carefully. The thing struck her as quite unreal, although she had speculated on the possibility of his illness.

Then her mind, working reasonably, went on. She thought of trains and money. She had fifty—no forty-nine dollars and seventy-five cents. It wasn't enough, she knew.

She had the time tables which she had obtained the day before. She studied them, her body held tautly, her face calm, showing a control which had come unconsciously. She could leave at three fifteen that afternoon. She'd have to change trains at midnight. She'd get there at noon next day. There was money. She must have money. No one to get it from unless she wired her father—better not—Miss Duffield away—Mr. Flandon away—Cele had none. She thought even of Ted Smillie. Better not—she'd pawn something. That was what people did when they needed money.

Like most girls she had a small collection of semi-precious jewelry—nothing of great value. She opened

the little mock-ivory box on her dressing table and considered the contents carefully. Then she closed it, put on her hat and stuck the box in her pocket.

Pawning was unlike any experience she had ever had and not as exciting as books had led her to believe. She felt no shame—only a vague hostility to the pawnbroker. She hated his having so obviously the best of the transaction. He was scornful in her array of articles to sell—the gold bracelet that had cost her father thirty-five dollars—the little one carat diamond ring that had been her mother's—the opal ring—the seal ring—the little silver locket.

In the end he gave her thirty-three dollars, and with the money in her hands she immediately got his point of view. She had exchanged a lot of things which meant little to her for the boundless power of thirty-three dollars which added to forty-nine made eighty-two.

She bought a ticket to Fairmount, Montana. It cost her twenty-eight dollars and sixty-four cents. She put it in her purse and went home, a splendid sense of action stirring her.

It took her a very short time to pack her bag. There remained two hours before the train. She spent it sitting in her room and letting the knowledge of what she was doing penetrate her mind. It occurred to her that she should let some one know where she was going but in the face of Gregory's illness it seemed even less possible to confide the news of her marriage. That was to have been a glorious revelation to a few people. She could not turn it into tragedy, so she decided to tell no one.

To her father she wrote a letter.

Yet even to him she could not tell the facts. It seemed now when circumstances seemed to imperil her secret that she clutched it even more tightly to herself. She could not bear the thought of comment breaking in like a



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destructive barrage on the secret glory and beauty she cherished. In her absorption she did not think much of consequences or possible worry for any one. Only as she told Mrs. Miller that she wanted to pay up for her week and that she had been called out of town, did it occur to her from a comment of Mrs. Miller's, that her mother was coming in a day or two. The complication puzzled her—then she overrode it boldly. It was one of the things that had to be. So she wrote a note for her mother and entrusted it to Mrs. Miller. It was only a few lines to tell her that she had left the city—"I'm sorry that I can't be more definite about my plans. There's nothing to worry you, mother. It's quite all right and I'm not doing anything I shouldn't. So please don't worry about me. Only trust me, won't you? I know you will." She sent her love and for all her assurances on paper that she knew her mother would trust her she sealed it with a dubious look.

In the letter to her father she was, if not more informative, at least more expansive.

It was incoherent, reassuring, happy, sad—the kind of letter that carries with it great fear to the one who reads it and who sees how delicate the balance is on which the future is being weighed.

Freda mailed the note to her father, left the one for her mother with Mrs. Miller and went to the station. Almost before she knew it the long train, with a jerk of its loose hung body had gathered itself together and moved out of the yards through the scattering, blackened railroad district. She watched the little houses and let her mind sink into a blur of remembrance and anticipation. She was going to Gregory. No more waiting for letters, no more dreams. Whatever it was that was to come, it was reality—something to feel and to do—not to wait for.

She slipped her wedding ring on her finger and displayed her hand a little absurdly on the edge of the window casing. Marvelous symbol—that ring, she thought. Too bad that people had come to regard it so disdainfully. How ill it must have been treated to have sunk into such disrepute. Across the aisle of the day coach she saw a like ring on the hand of a woman. It was a fleshy hand and the coarse pink skin pushed itself up on either side of the encircling band but Freda felt kinship and friendliness. With this unknown woman, with the unintelligent face she almost felt it possible to converse intimately—as if she might cross to her and say, “I am Mrs. Gregory Macmillan. Are you going far?”

When the shadows fell thick across the prairie and a white-coated waiter, a shade more important in his manner than he had been in passing through the Pullmans, had intrigued a fair number of the day-coach passengers into the diner, Freda rose a little stiffly. Her chin had red marks on it where she had cupped it in her hand for so long and there were streaks of coal dust under her eyes. She made a perfunctory and inadequate attempt to look presentable and faced a new adventure. She had never eaten on a train in her life.

The warm bustle and luxury of the place stirred her senses and brought her out of her lonely rhapsody into an appreciation of what went on around her. The adventure spirit came to the surface. Freda Thorstad—sitting at a tidy table in a dining-car, on the way to her husband. There was no disloyalty to Gregory’s illness that she could not resist the enchantment of shining dishes which looked like silver and warm and savory smells and smiling, interesting travelers, with above and around it all the clatter and rush of the train, moving on to a hundred destinations, a hundred tragedies and comedies



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and romances. Her thoughts at least admitted no staleness as a possibility.

The meal stood out in her memory. She never forgot it. Tentatively she ordered, tea, biscuits and lamb chops. When the lamb chops came they lay on a platter with little sprigs of parsley offering them up and made her very hungry. They looked delightful but inadequate. She ate hungrily, for these last few days she had had little food.

Four—five—dragging hours. She bought a magazine with a flaring girl on its cover and read avidly, her mind sinking into its soporific fiction with weariness, getting respite from her own sharp and vivid thoughts.

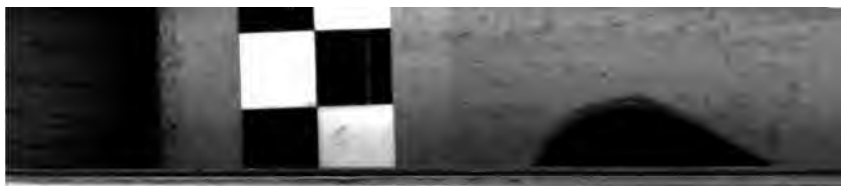
The conductor came to tell her that this was her station. He lifted her heavy bag for her and carried it to the foot of the steps of the coach.

Then came the excitement of the swoop and pause of the Flyer. Freda was bundled aboard, hat awry, nervously watching for her bag, taken from her hands by some one, porter or conductor. The curtains swung from all the berths. The porter's voice was low and lazy. He showed her to lower six—a little cubby hole with curtains drawn aside, revealing the delightful neatness of the berth. Freda knew even less of sleeping on trains than she did of eating there. Awkwardly she managed to undress and crept in between the thick white sheets. In the darkness she lay awake, wondering. Wondering at the rush and sound and the mysteries shrouded behind green swinging curtains. When the train shrieked a signal or stopped lurchingly at some station she pushed up the curtain beside her and, propped on her pillows, lay looking into the night tasting the full delight of inexperience. At last she fell asleep and dreamed of Gregory. It was a frightening dream. He did not know

who she was, did not remember her. Towards dawn she pushed her way out of it and woke up to see the rain falling lightly over the even country and to realize that she was begrimed with the coal dust and sticky with heat.

At noon she reached Fairmount and stood in the station looking about her for information. The excitement of the last lap and approaching climax of her journey overcame her fatigue and her eyes were brilliant. She decided to take a taxi to the hospital and chose at random one from a row of disheveled looking "For Hire" machines waiting for the daily debouch of passengers from the Flyer. She climbed in with her bag and closed the shaky door, and the driver started his motor. Freda's heart was racing. The cab could not go fast enough—nor slow enough. It seemed to her as if she could not bear what might be waiting of joy or sorrow, as if emotion was welling up so strong that it would burst its bounds and overcome her. Through the dusty cab windows she saw Fairmount—ill developed wooden houses with unhealthy looking trees giving little shade—a business district of twelve or fifteen squares with all the machinery of business being conducted as it was at this hour in hundreds of other First National Banks and Gilt Edge Stores and Greek Restaurants and brick office buildings. The cab whisked through it rapidly and came to a section of broader streets where more impressive looking houses of brick or stone appeared at leisurely intervals. A little park with a dusty looking playground adjoining it. A row of apartments and there on the corner where a "Silent Zone" sign, awry and disregarded by a group of boys playing in the street made a vain appeal, was St. Agatha's Hospital.

Inside the little entry was an office with three or four



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glass windows, behind which she looked for an informant. A slim, weary looking nun came at last, looking at her from behind steel rimmed glasses without curiosity.

"Macmillan—yes," she said, "you're—?"

"I'm his wife."

The nun accepted the fact simply and as if she yielded Freda certain rights and privileges. Freda felt frightened. She wanted to go into Gregory's room, kneel down by his bed and tell him to get well. She could see it wasn't going to be as direct as that.

A buzzing, muffled bell, sounded by the nun, had summoned a nurse, who came into the office thumping heavily on her flat rubber-heeled shoes. She was commissioned to take Freda to the last room in corridor "A"—the "typhoid case." Freda left her bag in the office and followed the nurse, as she clumped indifferently along. The presence of the nurse bothered her. She wanted to get rid of her—tell her she would go on alone but she did not dare. In corridor "A" the nurse gave her a chair.

"I'll find his nurse and see if you can see him now."

"I'm his wife," said Freda.

The nurse nodded.

"I'll get the nurse first. She wouldn't like me to bring any one in without calling her first, you see." She smiled a little as she explained this convention of the hospital and her smile angered Freda. It seemed an intrusion.

Gregory's nurse came to her. She held out a friendly hand.

"I'm glad you've come. We're doing our best but I was glad when the doctor wrote you," she said simply.

Something in her tone pricked the adventure spirit in Freda. It lay flat, useless, a bit of torn balloon. She saw herself as this other woman saw her—a wife, come in time of stress to a sick husband, not a lover to a meeting.



That was what she herself had colored her worry with.

Panic seized her. She followed almost resistingly. The door, with its printed "No Visitors" sign was opened softly. She had to accustom her eyes to the darkness. A smell of disinfectants, clean and pungent, came to her. There was the bed, white and high. She made her way towards it falteringly. The head, bandaged for coolness, did not turn to her. It was only when she stood by the bedside that it moved a little, restlessly. He did not look real to her, not like himself.

"Gregory," she said mechanically.

His fever-dulled eyes looked up at her—lighted. He made one motion permeating his whole body as if he would rise in spite of the quickly detaining hand of the nurse.

"Angel," he said huskily, "you angel of God—Freda."

The sound of his voice was a release. All her frightened feelings, reassured, warmed into life, flooded Freda. She sank down by his side, her head bent over the hot hand, which lay so impotent on the gray blanket.



## CHAPTER XVII

### GAGE FINISHES IT

**T**HE Convention went on as Gage had predicted. It held few surprises. Here and there a wave of new sentiment was perceptible but the old rules held good. The tremendous heat was a factor. It made many of the delegates relapse very easily into the political fatalism which is the breath of life to party control.

To the women it was more interesting and more disappointing than it was to the men. They were interested because it was all new. They were disappointed because every one seemed to give in to the obvious so readily. Harriet Thompson and her group were somewhat grim—humorous enough. They had not expected anything else really.

It was an exhausting week. There was a threat that the Convention might go over into the succeeding week but that was unfulfilled. Saturday night Margaret and Helen went back to St. Pierre too tired and worn to even talk much to each other, thoughtful, depressed a little and revolving new enthusiasms at the same time. But now that they were emerging from the impersonal world in which they had been they felt the pressure of the personal responsibilities they both were speeding toward, perhaps, for they sat in silence in their compartment, each full of her own reflections. Younger and less experienced women would have welcomed the egotism of their own visions—the anticipations of scenes in which they would be central. Helen and Margaret, fresh from the lift of

experience which was largely intellectual, did not look anticipative, or particularly happy.

Helen had wired Gage that she was coming and he met her at the station. One glance at his dark face told her all she needed to know of his mood. He took her bags, not offering to kiss her and she and Margaret, oddly constrained, got into the waiting car. Margaret was dropped at her apartment and there, at the door, Gage vouchsafed his only conversation. He asked them briefly if they "were satisfied with the show" and his voice was heavy with ridicule.

"I think we were," said Helen, "we didn't expect as much as you did, perhaps, Gage."

A light answer, ringing sharply. Margaret went into her room and flung open the windows to air it. At the window she looked down the street but the Flandon motor had disappeared.

Helen kept wishing that it were not Sunday. Sunday was such a long, intimate, family day. She meant to have been very definite with herself about what her mode of approach to Gage would be. She found herself floundering again. Of course there could be no compromise now. This business with this girl had to be sifted through, admitted—faced. She supposed there was nothing at all left of any feeling for Gage. He had been outrageous and, even as she thought that, she worried about him. He did look so very badly. Other people must be noticing it too.

He said nothing. At the house he helped her out and went into the house with her. She sought the children. They were delightful and welcoming, full of questions, of tales about the fun they had while she was away, eager for presents. Helen kept the children with her, nervously, postponing the encounter with Gage, wishing he would go down to the city. But he did not. He hung



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about, ominous, smoking, reading, yet not reading with absorption, suddenly throwing book or paper aside and restlessly trying some new one, watching Helen.

She was pent up. There was such a contrast between the easy interchange of yesterday and the constraint of to-day. The house didn't seem big enough to hold her and Gage. She went about her work trying to be normal, directing the maids, playing with the children, unpacking her bags. All the time she felt him watching her even if she were not in the same room, felt his brooding concentration on her, knew he was wondering what she thought about, whether she was glad to be back, what she was going to do about Freda Thorstad. For the first time in her married life, she had the sense of marriage as a trap. It had never been that. There were times when she had been a little restive, but she had always been building on a rock of belief in marriage, joy in it. It was different to-day. She felt as if she had come in out of the fresh air of clean discourse, free intercourse, into a narrow room where she was shut up with a growling man—a room heavy with discord, enmity, suspicion.

The morning passed somehow. They had finished dinner and she was waiting for Gage to propose something. He usually took the children for country drives on Sunday. They were in the big sunroom, shady now with its awnings let down, and Helen was stretched out on a white willow chaise longue trying to believe she was ridiculous and making mountains out of molehills when a maid came in to announce a caller.

"There's a lady and gentleman to see Mr. Flandon."

"You hear, Gage?"

"Who is it?" asked Gage.

"I think it's a lady who's been here before."

Gage's face was interested. He rose from his chair and followed the maid. Helen heard a brief colloquy of

voices then Gage saying, "Come out here where my wife is, Mrs. Thorstad."

He reappeared through the French doors with the little Mohawk lady behind him, and behind her a man, a rather stooping, pleasant-faced gentleman with well poised head and an air of mingled anxiety and embarrassment. His manner was unlike that of his wife which was definite, sharp, assertive, even before she spoke. As she saw them Helen had the quick perception of a crisis. The parents of this girl here together could mean only complications of trouble. Her mind stiffened itself for whatever might be coming, as she rose and greeted Mrs. Thorstad with easy cordiality and accepted the introduction to her husband graciously.

"Did you enjoy the convention? I didn't see you again after Wednesday."

"No," answered Mrs. Thorstad, "I came up to St. Pierre on Friday night."

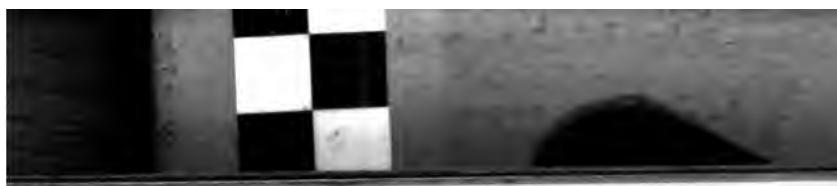
She seated herself in the chair Gage brought for her, a little uneasily, with a righteous wriggle of her thin body. Her husband and Gage stood together exchanging a few commonplace remarks. The air was electric.

Surprisingly, it was Mr. Thorstad who began.

"We are sorry to intrude upon you on this Sunday afternoon but our errand is pressing and it will be best to make it clear at once. My daughter has been employed in your office, Mr. Flandon."

"Yes?"

"My wife came from Chicago to pay her a brief visit. She found that Freda had gone away, leaving no address with any one. We are very much concerned—greatly disturbed. My wife went at once to your office and there saw your partner—Mr. Sable, is it?" Gage inclined his head—"You were not there. I believe Freda was directly in your employ. Mr. Sable tells my wife



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that Freda resigned her place on Friday morning. Questioning him we find that she was asked to resign—that," he paused and spoke with difficulty, though still calmly, "that rumors subversive to her character have been afloat. She has disappeared, Mr. Flandon." The stoop in his shoulders had somehow straightened. He was as tall as Gage as he looked at him with restraint and yet with indictment. "Do you know where my daughter is, Mr. Flandon?"

He stopped. Mrs. Thorstad edged to the side of her chair, foot tapping nervously on the floor, eyes on Gage. Helen's eyes were on him too, though there was no change in her attitude. She had not paled or flushed. It might have been the most casual of conversations.

The second before Gage's answer weighed on all of them. He looked as if he were pondering something—then back at Mr. Thorstad. His voice was even and controlled.

"No, Mr. Thorstad, I don't know where your daughter is."

"Why did she leave your office?"

"She was discharged by my partner in my absence, most unjustly, for preposterous suspicions. I shall do my best to reinstate her."

"It will not be necessary, sir."

Mrs. Thorstad could bear it no longer.

"And what were these suspicions?" She waited for no answer, turning quickly on Helen. "I went to see Mrs. Brownley to find out if she could tell me and her attitude is most peculiar—most peculiar. She insinuated that I should give up my work to keep watch over my daughter. She cast reflections on me as a mother. I told her that I had always upheld the strictest doctrines of the home and the family, that I had always insisted on a moral purity before everything else. That I should

be so treated amazed me! My daughter has always had the strictest upbringing. What ideas of modern license she had absorbed from contact with this Miss Duffield I am sure I don't know. I always objected to that woman. I asked Miss Duffield about it this morning. She doesn't know where Freda is—at least, she says she doesn't. Well—who does? You took her into your office, Mr. Flandon, you exposed her to this gossip—”

“Please, Adeline—”

“I need not tell you, Mr. Thorstad, that this unwarranted action of my partner has incensed me beyond measure. I have the greatest respect for your daughter.”

Mr. Thorstad inclined his head a little.

“We wish to find her, Mr. Flandon. We are greatly disturbed. My daughter went away of her own free will, according to a letter I had from her. She was evidently drawn by some enthusiasm of emotion.”

“She wrote you that?”

“To that effect.”

Mrs. Thorstad broke in again.

“Even before your wife, Mr. Flandon, I think we should tell you that we know that your name has been coupled with our daughter's name. Mr. Sable let us infer it. I'm sorry, Mrs. Flandon—”

She did not look sorry. She looked vindictive.

“I know,” said Helen, “I believe, Gage, that you could throw some light on all this. I don't *know* that you could but Miss Thorstad's parents should be relieved of anxiety if possible.”

Gage looked at his wife. Her eyes met his levelly, seemingly void of feeling, empty even of anger. Her resistance to pain woke admiration—then cruelty. So that was all she cared, was it? New woman—modern stuff!

“I do not know where Miss Thorstad is,” he repeated,

"I think, however, that a girl with her strength and control is safe wherever she may be. She may think it best to keep her plans to herself for the time being—"

"You speak with curious confidence, Mr. Flandon," said Mrs. Thorstad sharply. "This matter involves my daughter's reputation."

"From what I have seen of your daughter she is above gossip," answered Gage. He turned to the other man. "I am sorry I cannot help you. I am more sorry than I can say that she was treated unfairly in my office and I shall do my best to adjust that. If I should hear from her of course you will be informed."

Mr. Thorstad looked a little tired. He had perhaps keyed himself to this encounter and found it exhausting to have it end in futility.

"I shall pursue my inquiries, of course. It is not a matter which we care to have handled through any ordinary channels of search as we are informed by her that she left voluntarily. It may be that she will communicate with me to-morrow."

An embarrassed pause came.

"Come, Adeline," said her husband, still initiative.

Mrs. Thorstad felt and looked frustrated. She frowned at him, tight lips compressed. It was clear that she was neither pleased nor satisfied, that she wished to ferret further and the presence of her husband restrained her.

"The affair shall be probed," she said somewhat absurdly.

"You mustn't go out in this heat without a cool drink. Let me give you a glass of lemonade, won't you?"

Helen rang the bell before Mrs. Thorstad could protest.

"It's very good of you, Mrs. Flandon," she subsided, stiffly.



Gage seized his opportunity.

"I'll get you a real drink, Thorstad. Come out in the dining-room, won't you?"

Mr. Thorstad, on the point of refusal, checked himself. Gage's face was significant. He wanted to see him alone.

In the dining-room they were out of earshot. Gage poured two small glasses of whisky, his companion's restraining hand dictating the amount. Even then Mr. Thorstad waited. He raised his glass perfunctorily but did not drink.

"I'm sorry for this mess, Thorstad. I don't believe in taking notice of gossip ordinarily and you can't help what a lot of small people think. But I saw something of your daughter in my office. I admired her character, her idealism immensely. I—am not involved in any way with her. I believe wherever she is that she is happy—and safe."

"Did she leave the city because of that dismissal from your office?"

Gage strode up and down the room.

"That's it! I don't know. It might be. I was in Chicago. My partner took it on himself to let her go. How deeply he wounded her I don't know. I was appalled when I heard what he had done. I am going to make reparation to her in some way, I assure you. It's the sort of thing that is hard to repair but I shall do my best when I know where she is."

"Why did they talk about her in connection with you, Flandon, if there's nothing to it?"

"Fools. I shan't contradict them."

"It might be wise to contradict them."

"No." A gleam of hysteria was in Gage's smile. "Let them say what they please as long as it doesn't hurt Miss Thorstad."



"It may do that."

"Then we stop it. But there's no point in statements now that there is no possible connection between our names. The thing is to find her if you feel she ought not to be left alone."

"Why should she be left alone? She may be in distress."

"I don't think so," Gage was guarding Freda's secret as best he could and trying to reassure her father who so inspired sympathy and respect. "She is so controlled—so high minded that she would act wisely, I'm sure."

Mr. Thorstad looked at him curiously.

"Then you have no further information?"

"No—only I hope you'll take my word that I'm not involved."

"I am inclined to do so." Mr. Thorstad put down his untasted glass on the table and accepted Gage's outstretched hand. "I do not feel exactly as her mother does about the matter. Of course Mrs. Thorstad is actuated by a mother's great anxiety. I am a little more inclined to trust to Freda's judgments. She is, as you say, not a person to be the victim of any easy emotion or to yield to any false persuasion. She has great perception of the alliance between true things and beautiful things."

"I saw that," said Gage. "You're very wise, Mr. Thorstad. It's too bad she can't be left alone to work this out."

"Personally," went on the other, "the scandal doesn't perturb me at all. It is for her mother's sake that I feel obliged to overstep my own inclination to let Freda have her own time to make her confidence. I felt it necessary to trace any possible connection you might have with her disappearance. I—I am apt to take the word of a gentleman as truth, Mr. Flandon."

"You are very good," said Gage. "Very good. I am deeply grateful."

"Shall we return to the others?"

The two women were sitting silently, making no pretense at casual talk, their curiosity as to what the two men had said to each other indisguisable.

"We must go now, Adeline."

She rose, evidently torn by a desire to be easy and complaisant and a disgruntled lack of satisfaction in the interview.

"Very well," she said, "I'm sure I shall not be able to rest for a second until my daughter is safe and with me once more."

They were courteous to the little outbreak of melodrama but not too responsive.

Helen and Gage accompanied their visitors to the door and saw them walk down the street, the sunlight bringing out the shiny seams in Mr. Thorstad's coat, beating unmercifully on the defiant little daisies in his wife's hat.

Helen turned to her husband.

"Why didn't I hear of this?"

"I didn't know you'd be interested. You've been so interested in national affairs I couldn't suppose you had time for little local troubles."

She set her lips in anger.

"You gain nothing by viciousness, Gage. Where is that girl?"

"Haven't I said I didn't know?"

"I don't believe you."

"That's quite in line with your other theories of wifely conduct."

"I'm not interested in quarreling with you, Gage. I simply want to know for my own protection what is going on. Is it true that George Sable discharged that girl while you were away?"

"Quite true."

"For what reason?"

Gage lighted a swaggering cigarette.

"His mind runs along with yours, Helen. He had the same delicate ideas you have."

"Where did the girl go?"

"Didn't you hear me say I didn't know?"

"Has she run away from you too? Have you got that girl into trouble?"

"I always hated that phrase," answered Gage, nonchalantly.

"Why did you come back from Chicago so soon?"

"Why should I stay? A fifth wheel? The entirely superfluous husband of one of the great feminist successes?"

"I asked you why you came back." She framed each word with an artificial calmness.

"You haven't taken so much interest in me for years, Helen. It's true, isn't it? All a man has to do is to get involved in a scandal to have the women after him."

She pressed her hand to her face as if to shut out the sight of him.

"You're a madman, Gage."

"I shouldn't be surprised."

Then she dropped into a chair, weeping long sobs, drawn from emotion controlled beyond her strength.

"Why do you torture me so, Gage? What devil possesses you?"

He had always had a horror of seeing her weep. He took a step towards her.

"I'm tired—I'm tired," sobbed Helen.

Gage stiffened. "And why are you tired? Because you've been running around Chicago. I didn't tire you. You tire yourself. Then you come back exhausted and

blame me because you are exhausted. If you were more a wife—less a public character—”

She had risen and stood looking at him angrily again, eyes wide with hurt and disappointment.

“You jealous fool—you’re on the point of becoming a degenerate. If even Sable has to watch over your actions—publicly reprove you—”

“He won’t do it again,” said Gage, “not again. I am severing my connection with the upright Sable. He’ll never pry into my business again. I’ll tell you that for certain.”

She stopped considering the personal trouble in sheer amazement.

“You’re not going to break with Sable?”

“I told him yesterday I was through. In fact I told him cordially to go to hell. He can’t play the black mammy to me, you know.”

“But—what are you to do?”

“Oh, I’ll do something. I’ll show him whether I have to sit and take dictation from him.”

“You’re going to practice by yourself?”

“When my plans are ready, you’ll hear them, Helen.”

She shivered.

“I wonder if you’re headed for destruction.”

“You told me I was a degenerate. Well, we’ll see.”

Looking at him she saw, underneath the mask of tawdry control, the agitation he was in and the ravages of nervousness. His eyes were not steady—they were too bright and he had a way of biting at his lower lip which she could not remember.

She straightened her hair mechanically and went past him toward the sunroom. As she went she heard him return to the dining-room and stood with clenched hands trying not to interfere until she had thought things out.

Lying down in the same chair she had occupied before



## Gage Finishes It

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she tried to get some order into her thoughts. The problem of Freda, so overwhelmingly great a moment ago, was matched if not overcome by her realization that Gage was going from bad to worse—that he seemed to be on the loose mentally—tearing from catastrophe to catastrophe. The significance of a quarrel with Sable grew upon her—the probability of all the financial trouble that Gage might be letting himself in for. And the thing that she came back to time after time as her thoughts went around in circles was that Gage did not seem to care any more—that he was so recklessly indifferent to what she thought—to what was wise for the children and for her.

For the moment she had passed beyond the point of thinking of rights and wrongs. She was concentrated on immediate necessities. She almost forgot the complication of Freda and was shocked at herself when that came back to her.

She heard the sound of Gage's car starting down the driveway. He was going out then. All her feelings, her thoughts bore on one question. Where was he going?

## CHAPTER XVIII

### IN HOSPITAL

**A**FTER the first twenty-four hours with Gregory nothing seemed real to Freda outside of the hospital. She had found for herself a hotel room, a shabby little room in a second rate hotel, a room with scarred brown maple bureau and iron bed from which the paint had peeled. It looked out on a fire escape and a narrow court, helplessly trapped between tall brick walls.

To that room she went for her periods of rest, for the hospital had no vacant room or even bed, where she might relax. After she had gone to the hotel from the hospital several times the way seemed curiously familiar. Two blocks to the east, across the street car line, past the drug store with its structure of Tanlac in the window—one block to the north and there was the entrance of the hotel with seven or eight broad cement steps leading up to it. There was not one thing which she passed which impressed itself in the least on her imagination—not one image that was vivid enough to penetrate. Night and day it was the same—like moving blindfolded through still air. It was only when she went back to the hospital that her mind seemed to stir from its lethargy.

The hardest moments were those of Gregory's lucidity—when the sight of her made him flame with a passion which leapt through his restricted and suffering body, when phrases came to his hot lips which made her quiver with the sense of him. She would kneel beside his bed and tell him softly reassuring things and with his head turned on his pillow he would regard her from the depths

of those eyes, always haggardly set, but now far sunken.

She had no faintest doubts as to her past or present actions. That was Freda's great triumph over most of the women she knew. She did not doubt; she did not worry. Most of them had carried over into their new self-confidence and their new chances a habit of worry born of ingrowing responsibilities in the past and now fostered by general self-consciousness. It was unnatural to Freda to mope over her actions or to analyze them. She knew how to go ahead and there always was absence of self-consciousness about what she did, simplicity of manner, dignity of step. It was as if she had somehow stepped over the phase of altercation, doubt and experiment into a manner which did the unusual easily, but only if the unusual came in her path, which accepted new rules, new customs without a flush, and most of all was able to merge the best of feminism into a fine yet unchristened ease of sex. She did not need either the little fears or defenses of her mother or the larger ones of Margaret Duffield. It did not occur to her that she was very complete in herself and satisfying to herself. She bothered with no altercations or analysis.

It was not a wholly sad time for all the deepening anxiety and danger—it was not a time for depression. Freda knew that she had come to grips with life and she was glad to feel her full strength called to battle.

While they wondered about her in St. Pierre, while her name ran like a little germ of gossip spreading contagion from lip to lip in St. Pierre, she sat most of the time in the hospital, in the chair beside Gregory's bed, touching his hot, tense wrist with the coolness of her fingers—she sat outside his room in the recess of the bay windows on a curved window seat and watched people come and go—and once in a while she slipped into the hospital library and got hold of a book on pregnancy which fascinated



her. Skillfully manipulated conversation with the nurse had given her enough information so that she had been able to control a great part of her own present liability to sickness and she felt better than she had for several weeks.

Three days after her arrival Gregory came successfully through the first crisis of his illness. Freda walked on air the next day. The doctor was cheerful and jocose.

"We'll have that young Irishman of yours out of the woods in ten days," he said to Freda, and she had no doubt of it.

The difficulty was not in the progress of the disease but in Gregory's own debility. He was not so well a few days later. The doctor talked gravely of exhaustion and Freda picked up from the reluctant nurse that exhaustion during the third week was dangerous—that one might die because of it.

For the first time she was fearful. Here was nothing you could combat for him. Here was a slow slipping away. He did not often talk now. Almost all the time he lay, incredibly thin, mournfully haggard against his pillow, too tired even for Freda to call back.

She thought about death. One day she passed a room in which a man was dying. She heard the raucous gasp from the filling lungs and trembled. They brought a priest. She wondered. If Gregory should die, would he too have a priest to guide him out? She supposed that usually you sent for a minister or priest. A month before the mere suggestion that a soul needed ushering into immortality would have seemed absurd to her healthy pagan young mind, but now, with the severing of the thread so possible, with the limits of the unknown receding even while they grew close she wondered. Gregory was not formally religious but in his poems he had seemed so conscious of God.



## In Hospital

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"Most poets write of women—but you write only of God and Ireland." So she had said to him, she remembered, and he had answered.

"I shall write of woman now, dear heart."

She went softly to his door. No change. Well, she would go to the hotel for an hour— But the nurse stopped her.

"Mrs. Macmillan, he is not so well. The doctor thinks these next twelve hours will be the worst. If you wish to leave I think it will be all right. If not, I can see that you get a supper tray and if he is better in the night you can take my cot."

Freda felt a strange chill rushing over her.

"I'll stay." She looked at Gregory. "Worse? He looks just the same."

"He is weaker—"

The stillness of the phrase—the helplessness. She sat down in the chair by him again. It seemed so absurd not to call him back—so impotent. He looked unguarded. If—if he should die he would go—wherever it was—there must be a future for a soul like Gregory's somewhere—he would go alone. Cruel. She thought of the child growing within her. How much more gentle was birth than death. Gentle and gradual and kind. It was shared, but this horrible singleness of dying—

She had supper in the nurse's kitchen. The nurses were kind to her, faintly curious, preoccupied, full of that gayety so characteristic of nurses when for an hour they can slip out of the technique of the manner which they affect and become informal, unrestrained. The shadow of Gregory's crisis rested on them not at all, Freda thought. She was not resentful. But she ate to please the nurse who had managed to get the supper for her and then went quickly back to Gregory. If it should happen when she was away! It must not. She must

go there to keep it from happening. Surely she could. Surely she could.

She did not sleep. The nurse watched on one side, she on the other, the nurse nodding a little and Freda shaking off the fearful drowsiness that came over her too. She did not want to sleep. She was afraid that if she slept, it might happen. It was like sentry duty. As long as she was awake such a thing would not happen. She did not name death in her thoughts. It was like invoking a presence. She understood trite phrases as she thought—the triteness of “he has left us,” “passed on,” “was called.” How those phrases irked her in the newspapers sometimes. But they were true. It was like that. She heard the soft rise and fall of the nurse’s breathing. She was asleep—no, not quite.

Now and then he moved a little. His troubled breathing seemed to sigh, slight, weary sighs. Freda bent close over him. Here we are, she thought, he and I and him within me. We must stay close, closer than death can come.

Three hours later, with the gray light coming so early into the room, the nurse, who had slept a little, roused herself, busy immediately with the routine of temperature taking, her cap a little askew, her face puffed with uncompleted sleep.

“Well, we got through that night all right,” she said cheerfully, softly. “And our patient looks better, Mrs. Macmillan. Look at him—doesn’t he?”

Freda looked shakily at him. It seemed almost true. He seemed to be sleeping almost naturally.

“Then you think he’s come through?” she ventured.

The nurse straightened her cap professionally.

“Well, I should say that bad turn he took last night would be the last. He’ll be coming along now. We’ll get some nourishment into him pretty soon. You go over

to the hotel and get some sleep—no, lie down here on my cot. You look weak.”

And now it was a new atmosphere—an atmosphere of convalescence, of Gregory coming slowly back to life, visibly changing for the better, smiling, joking feebly, watching her wonderingly and devotedly, talking when he was allowed.

“It’s such a ridiculous way to begin housekeeping,” Freda would tease him, gently.

“It’s a maddening way and a marvelous way—to have all day to watch you and adore you and not to dare to pull you into my arms for fear a nurse will pop out on me.”

“You may be sure one would.”

“How long do I have to stay here?”

“A wheeled chair next week if you are good and don’t get excited.”

“A wheeled chair—when I want a highway with you beside me—”

“If you’re impatient—” she stopped to smile at him.

“Listen, Freda—we go straight off together, don’t we?”

“Off where?”

“Back home.”

“We should stop to see my father and my mother. Do you know, Gregory, I didn’t even tell any one where I was going. I just came. I suppose they’re all mystified and probably worried. Though I wrote them not to be.”

“Well, we’ll stop to tell your parents. And then off for Ireland.”

“Have we enough money?” asked Freda.

“Plenty. I have it somewhere. Let me see. It was a black bill case—maybe you could find it for me. Black bill case with an elastic band around it. There’s about

five hundred. They paid me in notes—(bills, you say)—at these last places and I meant to get post office orders. Much safer. Hunt it up, will you, darling? And you might be looking up passage."

"Passage for weeks from now," she said sternly. But she was as eager as he and they smiled at each other, doubled, trebled in happiness now that their storm had come and they had been able to weather it together.

She went on the trail of the black bill case and found it easily enough. It was, with Gregory's few valuables, in the possession of the hospital office. In it were some papers, some letters and twenty-three dollars. Her heart fell with a thump.

"Is this all there was?"

"His watch too—we never leave valuables with sick patients who have no relatives about. They might get picked up and the hospital be considered responsible."

"I mean all the money?"

The nurse in charge of the office wrinkled her forehead and looked at the note regarding Gregory on her record.

"Black bill case—letters—papers—twenty-three dollars in currency. That's what he brought here. Is that correct? We've kept the bill case in our safe, of course."

She looked questioningly at Freda.

"That's what is here," said Freda, "but you see my husband thought there was more—quite a lot more. I wonder was he sick in the hotel long?"

But the hotel was a blind trail and a suspicious one. The chambermaid who had called the doctor for Gregory had left the town—strangely enough two days after he was taken sick. She had never been a competent girl—The hotel courteously disclaimed all responsibility and hoped the loss was not great. There was a safe in the office—guests were requested and so forth—.

"Of course," said Freda, "I quite understand." She did. She understood that the money had vanished and that it was not coming back to her or to Gregory. She went back to her hotel room and counted what money she had. With Gregory's present resources they had fifty dollars between them. And there was an unpaid nurse at five dollars a day—hospital bills, doctor bills, doubtless bills for all the medicines. All those things and no money to meet them, she pondered. Besides she must not tell Gregory. She must not worry him just now or disappoint him. The nurse wanted him kept calm and cheerful. But in the meantime, what was she to do?

It was hard going back to the hospital and facing the nurse. The nurse was so good to her and Freda felt miserably that to let her be so good when there was no money to pay her was deceiving. She herself was hot and troubled. Her clothes were an annoyance. She had only three blouses and one of those was torn at the neck irremediably. It was hard to keep cheerful when you needed fresh clothes so badly and had hardly enough money to pay the hotel bill mounting up against you. But she forgot all that in the presence of Gregory. He was feeling better this afternoon than he had up to that time, his convalescence taking one of those quick strides so encouraging to those who watch. The nurse had propped him up on his pillows and he wanted Freda beside him.

So she let the matter drift and when he asked if she had found the bill case she told him "yes."

"Then that's all right," he said gaily, and saved her the lie she had ready. Nor did he waste more time on money. He wanted to talk of other things, to ask her questions and it was that afternoon that she dared to tell him that she expected their child, and to let herself

relax a little in the companionship of his happiness and the comfort of his reverence.

But when she went back to the hotel she could not bring herself to order supper. The menu stared at her—with ducklings and roasts and table d'hotes. Figure as she would, she could not order a supper for less than a dollar. So she pleaded a headache to the waiter and left the table to go supperless to her room and then to bed, for the nurse had said Gregory must be quiet that evening.



## CHAPTER XIX

### MENTAL SURGERY

MARGARET knew all about it now. From her point of view certain conventions of non-interference between husband and wife were so many links in the old chain. Undoubtedly it was not that she wanted to force Helen's confidence. But to come upon Helen the Monday after that exhausting Sunday, come to her to say good-by and make plans for the future, and to find the splendid dignity and poise of the Helen she had been with in Chicago destroyed angered her. Helen had told her the facts. She had to tell some one, she told herself in a justification she felt bound to make in secret, and Margaret was at least a stranger in the city and moreover the only woman she knew who would not make the slightest impulse to carry her story to other ears.

Margaret, in immaculate white linen, looking as cool and competent as an operating surgeon, had listened. She heard the whole of the story, how Gage had changed—for that Helen insisted upon.

"He's simply not himself. I suppose it's the feeling he has towards the girl."

"Don't 'the girl' her, Helen. I'm not a bit sure of that part of the story. Somehow it's too preposterous that Freda should be languishing somewhere waiting for Gage's casual attention. I tell you that girl doesn't languish. She's not that kind. She's the most magnificently unconscious modern you ever saw. She wouldn't be any one's mistress. She hasn't that much dependence in her. Not for a minute. I simply don't believe it."



"She disappeared the day after he came back from the convention. And then he was away that week-end she was seen at the Roadside Inn."

"I don't believe she was ever seen there," said Margaret.

Helen put her hand to her head.

"I don't want to believe it, but if he won't deny it—and isn't it possible that the poor child's run away even from him? If she should be going to have—oh, damn, I can't say it even—" She broke off a little hysterically.

"No—I don't believe that either." But for all her stout words, Margaret sounded a little more dubious this time. "Let's leave her out of it. What is there to do about you and Gage?"

"I despise my own incompetence of decision," said Helen. "But I don't know. I don't know how to go through the business. It seems impossible that we've come to the edge of divorce but I can't go on living with a man who acts as Gage does. I can't, that is, with any measure of self-respect. And yet I look around and the very weight of detail—the tremendous business of unwinding a marriage—it seems then as if the quick flare-up of partings that you read about—the separations that never involve themselves with the machinery of complaints and retaining lawyers and distributing property and—moving vans—are quite fantastic. I wonder if it's laziness which keeps me so fearful of the mass of detail, Margaret—"

"Of course you're trivial on purpose, I suppose," answered Margaret. "The things you speak of don't really bother you."

"Yes. Translated into more serious terms I suppose the thing that hurts is the terrible pain of cleavage between two people who have grown into each other for years."



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"More likely. Helen, I don't want to probe, but do you want to live without Gage?"

Helen pondered.

"I don't want to lose him. I feel dreadfully cheated—put upon. I didn't want any of this. If I'd known that he was going to feel so outraged at the political venture I'd have stopped, I think, before I let it get to an impasse. But I'm afraid it's that now. He and I were—well, there's no use debauching myself with memories. No—I don't think I want to lose him but even aside from this question of his disloyalty—this business with Freda Thorstad—he's becoming impossible to live with. The children are noticing it. He doesn't play with them as he used to. Goes off by himself. There's no free and easy interchange between us at all. Of course he's often flatly rude to me before the servants."

"Suppose you gave up all the things he doesn't like now, would that solve things?"

Helen shook her head.

"Not now. The thing has gone too far. We've been ugly to each other and we wouldn't forget that. Besides I'm afraid I'd be resentful. There's no reason why I should be completely subject to Gage's slightest word. We can't build on that basis."

"What he wants," said Margaret astutely, "is to have you subject to his dream."

Helen smiled rather ruefully.

"He might wake up from his dream!"

"That's the chance women have always taken—even the luckiest ones."

"I don't see that it's any use for me to think over causes and rake up a justification here and a justification there anyway," said Helen. "The only thing of vital importance is to decide whether I'm going to let events

come as they will and be passive under them or whether I'm going to try to manage the events."

"I shouldn't think there'd be much choice there."

"There is though. It's so easy to sit back and say, 'I'm trapped. I'll just have to take whatever fate sends. There's nothing I can do.'"

"But you won't, for there are no ends of things you could do. It's complicated of course. If you leave Gage, of course it puts a crimp in your political possibilities just now, not that the fact of separation would much matter but of course up to this point your political reputation has been partly builded on Gage's name."

"And I can't trade on his name and not live with him. But then I can't trade on his name anyway. I must define a position and take what is coming to me as an individual and give up the rest."

"No. It's complicated too by money. I haven't any, you know, Margaret—and Gage has made a lot but we've lived rather up to the limit of it. I don't believe he stands awfully well financially. If we are to separate things would go pretty much to pieces in every direction."

"Very much," said Gage. He had come in quietly and stood looking at them in a kind of derisive anger. "I'm sorry to break in on your conference, and on this delightful exhibition of my wife's loyalty but since we are all here, let's talk it over."

He sat down elaborately, his eyes on Margaret, ignoring his wife fixedly.

"Have you made up your mind what we should do, Miss Duffield?"

"Don't be insulting, Gage," said Margaret, "it's so unnecessary. I haven't been interfering with your affairs any more than was necessary."

"Than was necessary to release Helen from the chains of marriage?" Gage laughed. "Well, your work is done."



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As far as I'm concerned she's released. You may tell her, since you are in charge of our affairs, that I will leave her as soon as possible—and that is very soon—and that whatever financial arrangement is possible shall be made for her and the children. She is correct in saying that my affairs are in a bad way. Mr. Sable, from whom I have just separated in business, can tell her more about that. She might care to engage him to represent her in any action you might see fit for her to take."

Helen had risen to her feet, quite white.

"Stop!" she cried. "Don't you dare keep on insulting me. You're mad—abnormal—"

Gage bowed vaguely in her direction and continued speaking to Margaret.

"Tell her that she is right. I am mad and abnormal and that she has made me so, instigated by you. Excuse me now, won't you?"

He went upstairs but he could hear through the floor the swift, staccato, shrieking sobs of Helen's hysteria, hear the whisper of a maid to the nurse in the back hall, hear a murmur which must be the calming voice of Margaret. He paced viciously up and down—up and down.

Yet he had come home, driven by an invigorating impulse which had come to him inexplicably, perhaps born of pity and sudden insight into Helen's mind, come home to ask her forgiveness, explain what Freda Thorstad had told him and ask her to go away with him for a little while until their minds both cleared. The impulse had risen in his throat—it had choked him with delight and fear lest she should not be home. And then through the sunroom doors he saw them, two calm women, talking together, making and receiving confidences, uncovering him, dissecting him, and as he stood still and let the blackness of rage sweep over him again he had heard

Helen tell this stranger, this inimical stranger, of his financial condition. The sense of outrage overmastered him.

After a little it was quiet downstairs and he decided to go to the city again, going downstairs, looking straight ahead of him. He wanted to see the children, to have their reception of him ease this last sharp hurt. They were in the garden of course, and they greeted him with their usual shouts of delight.

"Well," he thought, as he bent down to caress them, "I can't stop now. I can't stop now."

He sat down on the garden bench and took the children on his knees, the boy and girl, so sturdy and happy, with fat brown knees and thick soft hair. They were full of comments and questions. Peggy was three and Bennett just eighteen months older. It was going to hurt terribly to break away from them. Sable had said, "You can't act as though you didn't have a family dependent on you." He had shown Sable that he could act that way, that the family dependent on him was not going to force him to knuckle under. He stroked Peggy's hair. How restful it was—if he could only stay here in this sheltered little garden with the children who had no tangles in their minds—if Helen would come out as she used to come out last summer and sit with him while they talked and planned of the beautiful things ahead for the children and their initiations into living.

Helen had deserted. She had gone off notoriety seeking. She preferred to sit in that room talking disloyalty to that woman to whose hard influence she had subjected herself—Helen was driving him out.

He kissed the children sternly and went back through the house. In the hall Helen met him. Her face was ravaged by hysterics, red hollows under her eyes, mouth pulled out of shape. It hurt to regard it.



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"Where are you going, Gage?"

For a moment he was gentle.

"Downtown. I'll not be back till late. There's no use trying to talk. We are killing each other." Then he thought of Margaret Duffield, listening perhaps and loosening his wife's hands from his shoulders, where she had placed them, he went out.

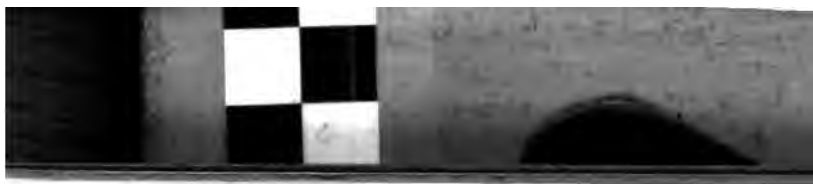
But that was not the only crisis Margaret had to meet that day. She was eager to go back to New York. There was no possible work left for her to do and she wanted to get away from St. Pierre. She did not tell Helen that she was planning to go in a few days as she had told her landlady that morning. When she left the Flandon house Helen was quite calm. With her fine power of organization she had already decided that the best temporary thing to do was to accept Gage's actions and see how far he would go, allowing her action to be modified by that later. Margaret looked rather pale. The reasonableness of her own mind was bound to be affected somehow by this drama through which she had passed and in which she had been forced to play so disagreeable a part. Perhaps it showed chiefly in the slight hardness of her attitude toward Walter Carpenter that night.

She never seemed to attack that decision squarely. She seemed to try to deny it a right to confront her. And yet, definitely, constantly, with less impatience than a younger lover and vastly more skill than a less intellectual one, Carpenter made himself felt. Now and then in their discussions and in their arguments, he destroyed some reason against their marriage. Her defenses had been made very weak. She had no argument against the lack of liberty in marriage which he could not destroy. He would grant anything. Indeed he asked only for the simplest, most unadorned marriage bond—and compan-

ionship which she had admitted she enjoyed with him. She might retain her own name if she liked without any altercation—might leave him for months at a time—he let her frighten him with no such threats. He offered too, more leisure for thought than she had ever had in the pressure of earning her own living. She had told him a little of what it meant to always need all the money she had in the bank—to do many things and yet never have any feeling of ease, to fear dependency. "It would mean a charitable hospital or going to a remote little Pennsylvania town to an aunt who lived with my mother until she died and who lives on in the almost worthless little place where I was born." When she told Walter that, he had almost won her, so absorbed were they both in the pity and dread of her loneliness. Then again there leapt between them some deep-rooted fear, some instinct, some dread pulling Margaret back to her little island of celibacy.

It was far from an unpleasant, bickering companionship that they had. Margaret, at thirty, past all the desires of adolescence, informed without experience, had given Gregory nothing and had only been disturbed and made nervous by him, even while she appreciated his fine fire and ardors. Carpenter satisfied, soothed her. They had the same shynesses, the same dread of absurdities in themselves. And Margaret was afraid that she might be lonely without him and that too worried her. She did not want to be lonely for any one. So she told him and he laughed and ventured to bring her hand to his lips and hold it there. She did not draw it away, perhaps because she was reasonable, perhaps because she was not.

To-night he talked of Gage, reflecting the gossip of the men of Gage's acquaintance. With them the fact of the severing of the firm of Sable and Flandon was a sub-



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ject of much speculation. Walter was worried about it, in his own quiet fashion. Gage and Helen were both his close friends.

"Talking won't do any good," advised Margaret.

"Talking never did do any good with a man. It drives him into himself, and that's usually unhealthy. I mean the sort of talking which is full of advice, of course—or of prohibition."

"Yet some of you ought to do something with Gage Flandon before he goes straight to pieces." Margaret said nothing of what had happened that afternoon.

"Yes," said Walter absently, "he's been going to pieces obviously. But let's not talk about him. Let's talk about ourselves, Margaret."

They were driving through the summer night, trying to get all the coolness possible. It was soft warm darkness but the swift car made a wind which blew back upon them, laden with clover smells, deeply sweet. All the elaborate mental approaches which Walter had made to the girl he wanted to marry were abandoned. He stopped the car and put his arm around her, not supplicating but as if the time had come for concession.

"About ourselves. We talk too much impersonal stuff, Margaret. It's great fun but there's more to be done than talk. We must begin on the other things. We know each other's minds now. Let's know each other's feelings."

It may have been the night, the darkness, the remoteness of the country road which made him so bold. He tipped her face up to his and kissed her eagerly, quite different now from the calm mannered man who had sat so calmly in discussion with her night after night, who had squired her so formally, who had made love to her mind and tried to capture her intellect but never more, except for those two easily restrained outbreaks.



She stiffened like an embarrassed school girl, her hands pressed against his chest—

"Please don't, Walter—"

"Foolish girl," he said gently, "you mustn't tie yourself up so. Let your mind ride for a minute and just remember that we love each other, just as every one in the world wants to love and be loved."

All the while he talked, urging her, demanding her, he held her against him, unrelaxed.

"I love you," he told her. "And I want to be—oh, unspeakably commonplace about it. I want to indulge myself in a lot of emotions that are as old as the hills and as glorious. But I want you with me, darling."

Still she did not speak. He let her go a little and held her shoulders, searching for her eyes in the dimness.

"You do love me, don't you? Why, I've seen it for weeks. I've seen a look in your face when I've come in—it isn't boasting, dear, it's just a wonderful confidence I have to-night."

She freed her hands and clasped them tightly in each other. They seemed the index of some passionate inhibition, some repression, which was charged with nervousness. Her easy freedom had deserted her, and every muscle seemed drawn taut.

"Oh, my dear," he pressed her, "don't be so afraid. I won't take advantage of the fact you care for me. Is it that which holds you back—that worry about making concessions to a man? Everything I've ever said I've meant. I respect every militant inch of you. I love you just as you are and for it. But above all that—beyond it—there's more and hasn't the time come for the least bit of abandonment?"



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"Why?" Her voice was low, not as firm in its tones as it was wont to be.

"Why?" Carpenter repeated her question, "Why? Because we love each other or we don't. And we can't love at arms' length, dear. We've got to be close, trustful, together. You do like me, don't you, Margaret?"

"You know I do."

"And you know I love you. Won't you come a little way to meet me? I'm so sure you can trust me. I'm so sure we could be happy. Just let your mind rest. Let yourself go a little."

Her mood was chilling his. He tried to gather up the shreds of the impetuosity that had first driven him to embrace her.

"Let's not talk," he said again, almost plaintively, "Can't we just—rest in each other?"

"But why are you afraid of talk?" she protested.

He dropped his hands from her shoulders.

"Have I been afraid? Haven't we talked on every conceivable subject? Haven't we said enough to understand each other perfectly?"

"Then—"

"Margaret, dear, we're at it again. This is what I protest—dragging argument into every natural emotion. I don't want to be mind to your mind to-night. I don't want to reason or even think—I just want to be man to your woman and caress you without thought."

But the verve had gone out of his words and as it went she seemed to regain her confidence. He made a last attempt to bring back his spirit. But his embrace seemed to stiffen her. He withdrew his arm and sat tapping on the steering wheel.

"When will you marry me, Margaret?"

No impetuosity in his voice now, no romance. It met hers in calmness.

"I don't know."

"You must know. I can't stand it any longer. You must or you must drive me away. There's no sense in further talk. You know I'll exact nothing but the right to be near you. But I must have that. I must know. It isn't as if I were younger and could rebound from one love into another. You've got me. I don't think of anything else. You color every bit of work I do—every bit of thinking. I'll trust to your terms. I've spent weeks building up my theory of marriage to suit your desires and visions. I don't want to play upon your sympathies but I've got to have you, Margaret—or not."

He sounded very discouraged, very humble, very desperate.

"I think I'd disappoint you, Walter."

The pity in her voice and her own discouragement made him turn to her again but she held out a hand to meet his and he stayed, letting her clasp his hand loosely.

"I'd be just like this all the time. You think I'd change—under emotion—when we were married. I don't think I would. You don't know how all the things I've thought and seen have influenced me. I couldn't go into marriage believing in it much. I couldn't—go through it—trusting it much. And when I was cold and I'd nearly always be that way, you'd be disappointed if not angry. And if I did do as you say—relax—I'd be spoiling it by not trusting my own feeling. Don't you think I know? Don't you think I almost give in and then some devil of analysis comes and prods me into a watch on myself? I haven't anything to give, Walter—except just what you've had. And the reason I can't marry you is because while you say and I say that companionship is enough we both know it isn't all you'd want. And it's all you'd find. It's all I can give to any man."



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"But, my God, Margaret, women and men have to marry—."

"I know. It's all right for other women—most other women. I'm not speaking for them now. They can keep reasonable and still have enough feeling to transcend reason now and then—carry them through it." She still held his hand in a kind of cold comfort and he could feel her fingers tighten. "I've tried to have feeling lately, Walter—tried to see if I could find enough—and that kind of feeling isn't there. I can't—I can't—don't ask me."

She withdrew her hand now and sat looking straight ahead of her. A cloud slipped past the moon and as the earth brightened in the cold white light Walter, turning to look at her saw her quiet and rigid, tears in her open eyes, a slim statue of what she claimed to be, sterility of feeling for him or any man.

"I'm afraid that it's true," he said. "Perhaps you can't."

At that, coming as a terribly dreary acceptance, she let the sobs come and for a long while she wept, her head in her own hands. Perhaps she wept for him, perhaps for herself. He did not offer to touch her again—as if her dearth of feeling had spread to him in those few minutes. When at last she straightened herself again, he started the car and they sped silently back through the country towards St. Pierre.

"Good-by, then," he said, as they reached her door and he unlocked it.

"Good-by."

She saw his face, heavy and lined and stern and it seemed to hurt her cruelly.

"I've cheated you," she said pitifully, "but it's been myself too. It is myself."

He hesitated. For a moment he seemed ready to try

again and then he saw the pity in her face stiffen into resistance. Bending, he kissed her lightly.

"Nothing I can do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you."

She heard his car back away from the door. As long as she could hear it she stood listening. Then with swift definiteness she went to her closet and pulled out the trunk standing there.



## CHAPTER XX

### BARBARA BREAKS LOOSE

A glaze settled over the surface of events for the next few weeks in the Flandon household. Both Gage and Helen were torn away from too much indulgence in their own thoughts by the implacability of the things which they must do. Having broken up his legal connections with his own hands, Gage was confronted with the necessity of in some way making his next steps justify his past action and an unholy pride made him determined to show a doubting business world that he had been actuated by deep and skillful motives. There was the alternative of leaving St. Pierre and that he was disinclined to do. He wanted to start an office of his own and demonstrate with the greatest possible rapidity that nothing but benefit had accrued to him from his break with Sable. He guessed what he did not hear of the doubts about his move, and he wanted to put the world in the wrong if possible.

It was true, while he had found Sable's intervention in the matter of Freda the unbearable breaking point, that he had a kind of long deferred zest in contemplating his new business freedom. Sable's offer had been, in the beginning, far too lucrative and too flattering to lose but there was a cautiousness, a lack of independence in many of their mutual actions which had galled Gage. He was tired of the connection. He was at odds with the political clique to which his close connection with the Congressman held him. He was disgusted with the result of the convention—not that he had hoped for much but

the flatness of the political outlook, the beating of the old drums irritated him. There were times when the exhilaration of the chance he was taking lifted him up and if he had been drinking less steadily he might have turned the exhilaration to much advantage. But his mind was too nervous to plan steadily or well. It shot restlessly past immediacies into dreams of a future when he would have justified every action to himself and the world and particularly to Helen.

He ignored and avoided Helen's several attempts to come to an understanding on the question of money. She knew enough about their affairs to feel that this change of Gage must make a great difference in their income temporarily, even if he should ultimately succeed. It worried her greatly. She had made up her mind to a separation from Gage but mere independence did not solve the money question for them all. She wanted very much to know exactly where they stood and she was convinced that the spendthrift, financial optimism of Gage, characteristic always, but most marked now, was getting them into deeper waters constantly. Temporarily she and Gage had dropped their personal problem. In one brief, cold conversation Gage had suggested that, pending a settlement of his affairs and his new ventures, they waive the personal matters and Helen had very gladly agreed.

So the days adjusted themselves to a routine so smooth and orderly that sometimes even to Helen it seemed unbelievable that it was not the expression of ease and happiness. Only at times, however, for as she looked at Gage it was impossible not to be conscious of the strain under which he was laboring. He was often out nights, working or not—she did not know. She knew that the supply of whisky in the sideboard was replenished far too often to serve moderate drinking and she knew that Gage



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slept badly, for she could often see the light reflected from his windows in the early hours of the morning.

He never molested her now but left her to her own activities with hardly a jeer at them. Now and then some scathing remark escaped him and fell blunted from the armor of her indifference. But for the most part his early chafing under her prominence was gone. The flood of letters which came for her in every mail aroused no comment from him. He saw her at work on the organization of her section of the country and hardly seemed to notice what she did. Intent as she was on learning what she could do, how she could do it, always with the thought in the back of her mind that she needed to find a kind of work that would earn her independence as well as notoriety she put an entirely new seriousness into the work she was doing. The old dilettantism was gone and with the death of that half-mocking dilettante spirit came an entirely new zest for the work she did.

Mrs. Brownley was full of a glorious naïveté. She wanted to organize everybody. Politics fairly dripped from her impressive, deliberately moulded lips. She wanted to pin a small white elephant badge on every one she met. She had a practical eye that liked to translate enthusiasm into badges, buttons and costumes. Jerrold Haynes, rather indispensable now and then to Helen, said that he was sure that the end of the campaign would see Mrs. Brownley in full elephant's costume. Jerrold laughed at Helen too. He told her frankly that she was ruining herself for an observer.

"A year ago you were in a fair way to become the most beautiful philosopher of the twentieth century. Now you're like all the rest of the women—a good looking hustler. You've become ordinary in appealing to your big audience. You should have been content to charm Gage and me."



"I was. But I wasn't allowed to remain in my sloth."

"No—that serpent of a Duffield girl. I seem to remember Gage didn't like her either. I didn't, but undoubtedly Gage and I wouldn't agree on reasons, would we? Well, where is she now?"

"Down on Long Island somewhere with Harriet Thompson, resting. She was pretty well fagged out with the months here."

"Didn't marry Carpenter, did she?"

"No. Apparently she didn't or we might have heard of it."

"Carpenter saved himself from the yoke of feminism just in time, perhaps."

"I haven't seen him lately."

"He sits around the club all day and cools himself in case he should decide to keep an evening engagement and need to look fresh. I see him off and on. Doesn't look happy, for a fact."

"Anyway it's none of our business, is it?"

Jerrold laughed.

"Not a whit and therefore interesting. I hate talking about what is my business."

"That's a common failing," said Helen a little bitterly. "I never realized how epidemic until lately, since Gage has decided to go in for himself. People ask me about everything except my bank balance."

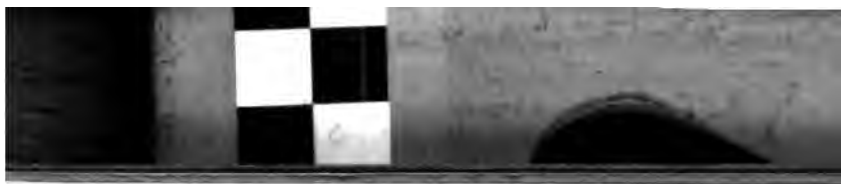
"The penalty of being in the limelight, Helen."

She shrugged lightly, a tinge of weariness in her manner.

"Don't you like the limelight then?" he urged teasingly.

Impatiently she turned on him.

"Oh, more or less, I suppose. But I shan't like it six months from now. I'll be tired to death of it if it still keeps coming. You get fed up on it pretty quickly."



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"So skeptical—"

"You needn't mock at me, Jerrold. You ought to admire me because I'm honest enough not to say that I weep every time my picture is in the paper. I go further. I am quite miserable when I realize that my limelight is directed mostly not at the inner workings of my mind but at my dress and my name and the fact that I take a marcel well."

"So you know that too, do you?"

"I know everything about it," Helen boasted mockingly. "I even admit the necessity for keeping my clothes pretty well pressed and clean. I may scoff with the rest of you at Mrs. Brownley's methods of organizing a Junior Republican Club but I know that she's the finest realist of us all. She is willing to admit that women love white elephant badges, and appeals to them as the virtuous sex, and fashionable Junior Republican Clubs, which are Junior Leagues in action. I can see myself developing a philosophy just like Mrs. Brownley and learning to speak of democracy and the home with her impressiveness and Mrs. Thorstad's italics and bending my energies to making the Republican party sought after by women because after all it includes all the best people."

"You're a great woman. I think I'll write a book about you."

She looked at him out of the corner of her eyes.

"You'll never write a book about anything, Jerrold. You're too dilettante to ever get started. I know. I was the same way until Margaret hurled me into all this action. Now I am, as you say, spoiled for a good dilettante. I'm spoiled for a lot of things, in fact. For being an easy going comfortable wife. I'm a poor wreck of a woman politician." She laughed at him and looked so mockingly pretty under the big gray chiffon hat she wore that Jerrold's eyes were lit with enthusiasm. Jer-

rold had motored Helen down to the Brownleys' summer home for a conference with Mrs. Brownley, who had the Junior Republican Club on her hands at the moment and wanted to talk it over with Helen. Mrs. Brownley had done a great deal of organizing and much of it was extremely effective along the lines suggested by Margaret and Mrs. Thorstad. But Mrs. Brownley knew that the lure of the social column was great and she had pressed Bob and Allie into action. The Junior Republican Club, composed of girls just preparing for the vote, was to be one of the educational features of the campaign. They would be useful, she pointed out, in helping when the Republican women had headquarters, later—and useful or not they ought to be interested.

So the Junior Republican Club was formed amid much enthusiasm on the piazza of the Redding Hotel at Lake Nokomis where St. Pierre sent its fashionable colony during the summer months. They had a president, and several news agencies had already taken pictures of them "reading from left to right and from right to left—standing in the back row, etc." One of the agencies had been acting for a New York paper and the girls were somewhat stirred over the novelty. As Allie said, "It was time some one did something. Look what happened to Russia where the Bolsheviks drove you out of your homes and took everything you'd got. If they'd been organized it might have been different." Besides her father said he thought women, especially educated women, (Allie spoke with personal feeling, having spent four thousand a year at the Elm Grove School) were to be the salvation of the country.

She had plenty of support and enthusiasm. Even in these spoiled and under nourished little minds a tiny flame of enthusiasm for the new possibilities of women's lives were burning. They interpreted the new freedom



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to suit themselves as did most other women. To them it meant a good deal of license, a cool impudence and camaraderie towards men, a definite claiming of all the rights of men in so far as they contributed to the fun of existence. "Women aren't as they used to be" was a handy peg for them to hang escapades upon, a blanket reason for refusing to accept any discipline. That was the substance of their feminism.

As for their politics they were hewed from the politics of their fathers and their class. They were defensive for the most part. They had heard of the exigent demands of labor, they had seen their fathers irritant under "Bolshevik legislation"—in their own shrewd minds (and many of them had the shrewdness common to smallness) they knew that all their luxury and their personal license, their expensive clothes and schools and motors and unlimited charge accounts were based on an order whose right to exist was being challenged. They roused to its defense, boisterously, giggling, and yet class conscious.

Helen did what she could to palliate any trouble the club might cause.

She pressed on Mrs. Brownley the need of not antagonizing possible and prospective members of the party by anything that appeared as snobbishness. Mrs. Brownley agreed astutely, starting post haste on a scheme for organizing the stenographers of the city and mapping out a scheme whereby the employees of the large department stores might be drawn into Republican groups. She urged Helen to talk to the Junior Republicans and Helen did it.

She noted Barbara among the rest, handsome in yellow linen and yet looking tired and worn. The artificial penciling under her eyes was circled by deeper yellow brown hollows, and her restlessness and lack of interest in the whole proceeding were conspicuous.

"What a world weary face that child has!" thought Helen.

She remembered one of Mrs. Brownley's confidences about Barbara's engagement and idly asked Allie about it.

"Is Bob engaged to Ted?"

"Oh, Lord, who knows!" said Allie. "She's had an awful row with him, but she's got his ring. I don't know what they fought about. And she's such a fool, for she really is crazy about him and he knows it so he doesn't pay much attention when she rows."

She stopped as Barbara came towards them.

"I'm going up to town over night. I wonder if you and Mr. Haynes would take me up? Have you an extra seat? I'll be a fine chaperon."

Helen frowned a little. She disliked the insinuation, just as she disliked Barbara, but the girl's request could not be refused gracefully.

"I'm sure Jerrold will be glad," she said rather coldly.

"When'd you decide to go to town, Bob?" asked Allie.

Another girl joined the group, overhearing the last remark.

"I think she's going up to keep a watch on Ted. One of the girls saw him with that pretty Thorstad girl one day at a hotel—the girl there's been such a lot of talk about."

Helen felt herself change color and as she tried to get quick control caught sight of Barbara's face. It was almost white, but not as if white from shock or pain—rather an ugly white, lips compressed, eyes lifted angrily.

"I don't consider myself in the least responsible for Ted's company, Mildred," she said sharply.

"Aren't you afraid to stay alone in the house with just Mathilda?" went on Allie.

Barbara looked her contempt.

"If you are there," Allie went on, "call up Mrs. Wil-



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kins and tell her I've got to have those new white skirts by noon Wednesday. If she doesn't get them here I won't pay for them."

"Write her your grouch," said Bob, graciously, "I've got my own errands."

They left Barbara at the portico of the big stone house where the shades were drawn down and the windows closed.

"Are you sure you'll be all right here?" asked Helen.

"Oh, yes," said Bob, "the housekeeper's here and father's going to take me back to-morrow night after I get my shopping done. Thanks so much for taking me up. And I do feel so guilty—"

But Jerrold speeded the motor and the sound of her voice was lost.

"What a lascivious little mind she has," he remarked as they drove on to Helen's house.

"And malicious, I think. It's odd. Her parents are really kindly on the whole. And Allie's just a nice clumsy child."

"Whatever hereditary influences might have made this girl, they've been completely choked," said Jerrold. "She's pure and simple environment—rotted by it just as she might have rotted in a slum somewhere. The only thing that has survived her complete subordination to money and luxury is old Brownley's acquisitive instinct—and God help the person who thwarts that!"

It was a considerate invocation if it had done any good, for at that moment Barbara was preparing to destroy any obstacles which lay in the path of her acquiring Ted.

She went to the telephone in her mother's room and called Ted Smillie's house. He was not in. She tried two clubs and finally located him.

"Yes, it is Bob. I came up—oh, to see a dressmaker.

No—just to-night. No—I'm tired and hot. I don't want to dance. You come over here. Why, of course it's all right. Do come. Well, I'll make you some lemonade and we'll have a talk. Of course. Eight—that's fine."

But it was nearly nine before he came. Barbara had found a black dinner dress which became her, and she had thrown open the windows of the second floor library to the cooling evening air. She had found some supper for herself, a casual, icebox supper but for her guest she had made sandwiches. Also she had hunted long and wearily for some key which would open the wine cellar and failed to find any. But there were lemons fortunately and she had, as she promised, made the lemonade. By eight she was all ready for him—waiting, in repose. By nine she was tense. In that empty hour she had much time for thinking and her thoughts did not rest her. They roused her to a nervous tension which was manifest in the quick gestures so unlike her usual pose of lazy indifference.

He rang at last and she slipped down the stairs to let him in. A single light burned in the hall cluster.

He looked down at her from his admired height, smiling without eagerness.

"Where did you drop from? Nowhere? I was going to go down to see you next week."

"I had to come up to town to see about some clothes."

He laid down his hat and turned to her.

"All alone?"

"All alone," answered Bob coolly. "Even the house-keeper's gone to see a sick sister and won't be back until morning. I guess the caretaker's in the basement—at least I told him to stay there."

"You going to stay here alone all night?"

"Why not? It's safe as a clock. Bars on mother's



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windows and all the front of the house. Safety locks on the doors. Nothing stealable in the house and a telephone and house phone in my room."

"All the same it's—"

"Unconventional? By this time you ought to know I'm the most unconventional person on earth. Women don't bother about conventions as they used to. We don't need chaperons at our elbows, thank goodness!"

He smiled appreciatively.

"Let's go upstairs to the library," said Bob, "and tell me what you've been doing."

He followed her obediently and they settled themselves in two great soft leather chairs drawn up to a little table, the tray of sandwiches and lemonade between them.

"What's new?" said Bob.

"It's dull as can be. Nothing stirring."

"Who've you been seeing?"

"Pretty much of nobody. A few stalemates around the club. That's all."

"Then why stay in town? Why don't you come down to join your mother? It's really not bad at Nokomis this year. Dot Lodge has two girls from New York visiting her that are pretty snappy. And we've gone in for politics. Formed a Republican club."

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Ted. "Torchlight processions and all that? Going to purify politics?"

"Maybe—can't tell."

"Maybe not, probably."

They scuffed around in tawdry repartee, going swiftly through a few motions of convention that seemed to cling to them. But shortly he was sitting on the arm of her chair and then he had her held more closely. For a while she let him fondle her, her cheeks growing hot. Then she returned to her line of attack.



"If it's as dull as you say here you ought to be in the country where we can make it less dull."

"Can't. Lose my job if I do. The old man said that he'd make no distinction in the office this summer. Me and the hallroom boys—we've got to do our eight hours."

"Sure it's that? Sure it's not some girl holding you up here?"

That pleased him.

"So you came up to see me because you're jealous, did you? Little cat!"

He caressed her as he spoke and she did not seem to mind what he said.

"No—I'm not jealous. But perhaps I'm lonesome."

"Not this minute you aren't."

She seemed to purr.

"Well, this is nice," he repeated.

"I wish we could stay this way forever. Isn't it fun to be away from every one?"

For answer he kissed her.

"I suppose you're dreadfully shocked by my unconventionality," said Bob, "but I don't care. I despise conventions. I think women have a right to do as they please. Anything they please. Women aren't slaves as they used to be."

She lay back, invoking her vulgar license in the name of the hard won liberties of women, corrupting the words she spoke.

"Look out what you say," said Ted. "Look out, young woman and don't get me to take you at your word."

She shivered ecstatically.

"Ted,"—the time seemed ripe, no doubt—"do you care for that Thorstad girl?"

"Who—Freda Thorstad?"



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"All the girls are talking because you were seen at some hotel with her."

"Let them talk, the silly fools."

She released herself a little.

"Where is she, Ted?"

"Why?" He began to tease her, and her lack of control showed instantly.

"You know she's disappeared. Why did she go and where did she go?"

"Why should I know?"

"You do know," she countered.

"I said nothing of the sort."

Pulling herself loose, she confronted him. Every thwarted undisciplined desire in her raged at the frail control maintained by habit. Her eyes, no longer sleepy, blazed at him.

"You know where she is. The creature has gone off somewhere to hide herself and her shame, I suppose. The abandoned hussy. I know all about it, Ted. I found out all about it."

He became a little surly and yet curiosity seemed to pique him.

"You know all about what, Bob?"

She was losing control completely now. The confession, abasement, she had worked up to was not forthcoming.

"Where is she?" she stormed. "Where are you keeping that girl?"

Her face had changed from that of a pretty girl to that of a furious, uncontrolled shrew. Her shrill voice tore through the empty room, struck against the silence.

"Hush," he said sharply, "don't yell like that, Bob. Don't be a fool."

"I won't have it. I won't have you making a laughing stock out of me. Before everybody—everybody's

talking, laughing at you—at me. You've got to give that girl up. You've got to! Pay her off and let her go away and hide till it's over."

The vein of caddishness was rich in Ted. He looked at her coolly—calculated her hysteria, made her maddeningly conscious of his imperturbability. Turning away, he lit a cigarette.

"So you won't answer me!"

"I really don't know what you mean, Bob. You hurl a lot of accusations at me and in the same breath you want a lot of promises. I don't know what you're driving at, my dear."

"Then I'm through with you," she said, viciously.

An impolite smile glimmered at the corners of his mouth.

"Oh, in that case—" He turned to the door.

But she did not have strength enough to let him go. She followed him, distressing now in her abandonment which was not even held together by anger.

"Ted—you know I care—how can you—how can you?"

He turned and appraised her. It was obvious now how much of her charm was in that thrown aside pose of indifference, lazy mockery.

"You told me you were through with me."

His voice was quite cold, stiff. It brought her to him with a rush, her arms thrown about his neck, cheek against his, hot, panting.

"I didn't mean it, Ted. Really, I was just about crazy. I won't talk about that girl—about anything. Let's just be as we were when you first came in."

"I didn't start all this," he answered sullenly.

She urged him back to his chair, pulled things into some semblance of order.

"There, let's be comfortable after all the melodrama.



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Here you must eat some of these sandwiches. I made them myself."

She poised herself on the arm of his chair and played with him.

"You can't understand how a girl feels," she told him, "under a lot of foolish teasing. They all know I'm fond of you—a little anyway" (that fell cold)—"and they take it out of me because I'm honest and not a flirt."

Ted chuckled. "Not a flirt."

"You know what I mean. A girl who has been brought up as I have—can't let herself go the way other girls of a different class can. I can see that those girls have an advantage. We're just as—we're just like they are only they've been brought up differently."

She paused for a moment in her fumbling, in the pleading to be admitted to the class of women of easy virtue whom she fancied held her lover in their toils, trying to convince him that she was ripe for abandonment. But he would not help her. He looked at her rather curiously—that was all.

Sighing she rested her head on his shoulder.

"It's so nice to have you here."

"But it's getting late, Bob. I'll really have to go."

She threw a restraining arm across his chest.

"Go where?"

"I have to get back—" he said vaguely.

It was time for her last card. Actuated by that vivid fear of his possible destination, perhaps, she relaxed completely in his rather unwilling arms.

"Don't go—don't go at all to-night. Let's just stay here—together."

She could feel him stiffen and looked up slowly, languorously, slyly at him. But she should have known what she would see—should have known that so easily played a game would not be worth the candle of compro-

mise which would bind him so much more to her. He was too sophisticated to be attracted by unsought abandonment.

"Look here, Bob," he almost shook himself to be free of her, "you're not quite yourself to-night. You're a bit tired and you'll be better for a night's sleep. I'll have to run along now. Don't come down. Good night."

She made a swift movement—then seemed checked by a vision of its futility. The other door closed quietly and heavily. Stripped of the pose that served her for strength, the vanity which served her for modesty, Barbara sat in the leather chair which Ted had abandoned and let her ugly imaginings consume her.

## CHAPTER XXI

### WALTER'S SOLUTION

**T**HE Thorstads had not gone back to Mohawk. Mrs. Thorstad had said that she would stay in St. Pierre until they heard further from Freda and since it was the school vacation her husband had agreed. After the first shock of disappearance they had accepted Freda's letter at its face value and decided to wait for news from her. It was all they could do, in fact. One alternative, publicity, advertising her disappearance, would have done only harm and have looked cruelly unnecessary in view of her farewell letter to her father. The other alternative, setting private detectives to work, would have been too expensive and again her letters did not justify that. They must wait. Mrs. Thorstad, after a bit, did not brood, nor indeed appear to worry greatly. She was quickly allied with clubdom and petty politics and was busy. Her husband, trying to interest himself in stray free lectures at the University and in the second hand bookstores, grew rather pallid and thin.

They stopped at an inexpensive boarding house on the West Side. It was a place of adequate food, adequate cleanliness and no grace. Mrs. Thorstad's reputation as a prominent club woman stood her in good stead in these rather constricted surroundings where most of the guests were men of sapped masculinity, high busted women dividing their time between small shopping and moving pictures. The men were persons of petty importance and men of small independence, but there was one strangely incongruous person in the company. He was the editor of

the scandal paper of the city, a thin, elderly, eye-glassed person of fifty, who had maintained, in spite of his scavenging for scandals, some strange insistence on and delight in his own respectability. He was personally so polite, so gentlemanly, so apparently innocuous that it was almost incredible to think of him as the editor of the sheet which sold itself so completely on the strength of its scandal that it needed no advertising to float its circulation.

There was a natural attraction between him and Adeline Thorstad. They had mutually a flare for politics and intense personal prejudices complicating that instinctive liking. They often ran upon the same moral catch words in their conversation. Robinson began to be a "booster" for Mrs. Thorstad. He saw her political possibilities and commenced to call attention to her here and there in his columns.

It was one of Mr. Thorstad's few occasions of protest.

"Shall you tell him to keep your name out of his paper or shall I?"

"But he's said nothing that isn't awfully friendly, Eric. I hate to hurt his feelings. I'm sure he meant to be kind."

"You don't want to be featured in 'The Town Reporter,' Adeline. It doesn't—it isn't right."

She let the stubborn lines settle over her face.

"I don't think the 'Town Reporter' is as corrupt as almost any of the others."

"Look at the stuff it prints!"

"But, my dear, if it's true, isn't there a kind of courage in printing it?"

He looked at her in exasperation, measuring her and his own futility.

"So you want to let that go?"

"I think it's better not to hurt him, Eric."

He shut the door of their room sharply and yet when

she saw him again he had regained his quiet indifference to her doings. The friendship between her and the editor continued to flourish.

They were in the dining-room on Tuesday, the third of August, when the morning papers were brought in. It was a sticky, hot, lifeless morning. Halves of grapefruit tipped wearily on the warmish plates. No one spoke much. The head of the silk department in Green's was hurrying through his breakfast in order to get down to inspect the window trim. The stenographer at Bailey and Marshall's had slipped into her place. Mrs. Thorstad was alert determinedly, Mr. Thorstad sagging a little beside her. Robinson picked up his paper first, casually, and uttered a low whistle.

"That's a bit of news," he said.

Several people craned and reached for the papers they had been too indolent to open. A headline ran across the page.

**PROMINENT CLUBMAN KILLS HIMSELF IN  
FASHIONABLE CLUB**

**WALTER GRANGE CARPENTER, CAPITALIST, SHOOTS SELF  
FATALLY IN EARLY MORNING HOURS. CAUSE  
OF SUICIDE MYSTERY.**

They gathered around the news without a particle of sympathy. No one cared. He was a mystery and sensation—that was all.

"Funny thing," said Robinson. "I wonder what was at the bottom of that."

"I shouldn't be surprised if it was the Duffield girl," Mrs. Thorstad said rather casually.

"Who was that?"



"You know—the political organizer who was sent here for the Republican women."

"Was Carpenter in love with her?"

"I think so. I saw him—well, perhaps I shouldn't say—"

Robinson gave her a keen glance and let the matter drop. But that night after dinner he sought her out again, segregating her from the rest of the people. Mr. Thorstad was not there.

"What was it you were saying about that Miss Duffield?"

She hedged a little.

"Oh, I don't like to talk scandal, Mr. Robinson. I'm no gossip. I never liked the woman. I always believed she made a great deal of trouble and I know she was not a good influence on my daughter. But I have no wish to malign her. If she is responsible for this tragedy, she and her free love doctrines have indeed wrought havoc—"

She paused abruptly.

"I wish you'd tell me what you know," said Robinson. "I'll confide in you, Mrs. Thorstad. I heard from a certain source to-day that Carpenter left this Duffield women everything he possessed. Every one seems to know they were seen around town constantly until she went away. There seems to have been considerable expectation that they would marry—surprise that they did not. Well—you can see that any information added—"

"But what good would it do?" She pressed him, her utilitarian little mind anxious for results.

"I'd rather like to know why Carpenter shot himself. So would other people. If this woman is a menace she should be exposed."

"She should indeed. An interloper, making trouble, trying to run politics—"

He surveyed her amusedly, familiar with outbreaks of spite, waiting for his point to win itself.

"You knew her well."

"I worked with her closely. A brilliant person—clever, modern. Modern in the way that these Eastern young women are modern. I did not approve of many things she did. I did not approve of some of the things she said. Then there was an incident which convinced me."

She went on, a little deft prodding keeping her in motion, telling the story of having seen Walter Carpenter come to Margaret's room and of having seen the letter from Gregory with its protestation that he must see her, that he wanted "to unloose her emotions—not fetter her in marriage." How those words had imprinted themselves on Mrs. Thorstad's mind! There was great satisfaction in Robinson's face.

"And this Gregory?"

She had thought that out too.

"Why it must have been that Gregory Macmillan. He came here later and she talked of knowing him. I heard Mrs. Flandon speak of it."

"Ah, the Sinn Feiner! Why, it's perfect."

She had a moment of fearful doubt.

"You wouldn't quote me? There'd be no libel—?"

"My dear lady, I've no money to spend on libel suits. I'll never get mixed up in one. Every bit of my stuff is looked over by a lawyer before it sees the light of print. Don't you worry. I'd never implicate a lady. Scourging a vampire"—he fell into his grandiloquent press language again—"is an entirely different matter."

"There's such a thing as justice," said Mrs. Thorstad bridling.

He nodded with gravity. They might have been, from their appearance, two kindly middle-aged persons discussing a kindly principle, so well did their faces deceive their minds.

So it happened that the next issue of the "Town Reporter" carried in its headlines on the following day—

**WAS MYSTERY OF SUICIDE OF RICH CLUBMAN ENTANGLED  
IN FREE LOVE PROBLEM?**

There followed an article of subtle insinuation written by the hand of an adept. It crept around the edge of libel, telling only the facts that every one knew, but in such proximity that the train of thought must be complete—that one who knew anything of the people implicated could see that Margaret Duffield (never named), believer in all "doctrines of free madness" had "perhaps preyed upon the soul of the man." And then after a little the "Sinn Feiner" came into the article, he too coming from groups who knew no "law but license." Ugly intrigue—all of it—dragging its stain across the corpse of Walter Carpenter.

The news had come to the Flandons at breakfast too. Gage had come down first and picked up the newspaper while he was waiting for Helen and the children. He read it at a glance and the blow made him a little dizzy. Like a flood there came over him the quick sense of the utter blackness of Walter's mind—more than any sense of loss or pity came horror at the baffled intellect which had caused the tragedy. He stood, reading, moistening his lips as Helen entered and lifted the children to their chairs.

"Any news, Gage?"

He handed it to her silently.

"Oh, my God!" said Helen, "How terrible! How awful, Gage!"

He nodded and sat down in his chair, putting his head in his hands. She read the article through.

"But why, do you suppose?"

Then she stopped, knowing the thought that must have come to him as it came to her.

"Poor, poor Walter!"

She went around the table to Gage.

"You'll go down of course, but take a cup of coffee first," she said, her hand on his shoulder.

He roused himself.

"All right."

Some one telephoned for Gage and he said he would come at once to the club. They went on with the form of breakfast. The children chattered. The room shone with sunlight. Helen, through her shock and grief, caught a glimpse of the shrinking of their trouble against this terrific final snuffing out of life. Abashed at the comfort it gave her, she drew away from the thought.

But it made her tender to Gage. It kept persisting, that thought. "It wasn't Gage. It might have been Gage. It might have been us. People like us do go that far then. How horribly selfish this is. Poor Walter!" She suddenly stopped short. She must telegraph Margaret. Margaret would have to know. Whatever there had been between her and Carpenter, she must know. Doubtless—perhaps—she would want to come to see him— Or would she?

She telegraphed Margaret as compassionately as possible. Yet it seemed a little absurd to be too compassionate. Margaret wouldn't like the shock "broken." She would want to know the facts.

The sun seemed brighter than it had been for days. Despite the grave weight of sorrow on her spirit, Helen

was calmed, attended by peace. She was feeling the vast relief attendant on becoming absorbed in a trouble not her own. It was not that her grief was not deep for Carpenter. He had been Gage's good friend and hers. And yet—it was almost as if in dying he had deflected a tragedy from her, as if he had bought immunity for her with his terrific price. She dared not tamper with the thought of what this might do to Gage.

The mail man in his blue coat was coming up the steps. She opened the door for him, anxious to do something, wondering if there would be a letter from Margaret. There was. She laid the others aside and read that first. It was a long letter full of thought, which at another time would have been interesting. Margaret had wearied of Republicanism. She and many other women were talking of the "League" again.

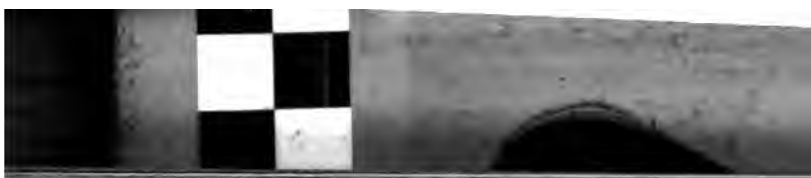
And Walter Carpenter lay dead. Was it relevant?

Helen put down the letter and looked through her others. There was one from some hotel in Montana. She ripped it open and the first words startled her so that she looked for the signature. It was signed by Freda Thorstad.

A swooning excitement came over Helen. She hardly dared read it. Then, holding it crushed tightly, she went up to her own room. As she went the children called to her. They wanted her to come and see the castle in the sandbox.

"Soon," she called to them, "I'll be down soon. Mother's busy—don't call me for a few minutes."

She locked her door and read the letter. What had startled her was that abrupt beginning "Asking for money is the hardest thing in the world—at least nothing has ever been so hard before." It went on "But I don't know what else to do, and I must do something. I can't write any one else, partly because no one else I know has



enough money to send me and also because I haven't told any one except your husband about myself—and I suppose he has told you. If he hasn't he'll tell you now that it is the truth. It's this way. My husband has been terribly sick and what money he had was stolen while he was at the hotel before I got here. He's still weak and of course he wants to go home. But I haven't dared tell him we haven't any money because he doesn't know the maid picked his pockets while he was ill. We have to get away from the hospital now that he's well enough to travel—we don't know anybody in the city and there are his hospital bills to pay. The doctor told me he would wait, but I can't ask the nurses to do that. It seems almost ridiculous for an able bodied person to be asking for money but we owe so much more than I can earn that I must borrow. There doesn't seem to be any way to get money sometimes except by borrowing. I know I could pay it back as soon as Gregory gets well again. I suppose you'll wonder why I don't ask father. Well—he hasn't as much money as we need. We need nearly six hundred dollars to take Gregory to Ireland and pay the bills here. Perhaps it would be better to get it from Gregory's friends in Ireland. But I know from what he's told me that they all are trying so hard to do things for the country with what little money they have that it would worry him to ask them. And it would take too long. He mustn't be worried, the doctors say, and he must get back to his home soon. You know something about him for I remember that I saw you at his lecture. He is really very wonderful and . . . It isn't as if I had a right to ask you either, except perhaps a kind of human right. . . . You've been so kind to me, you and Mr. Flandon. . . . ”

Helen finished the letter with a rueful, very tired smile. Then she took it into Gage's room and laid it on his

bureau where he would see it, when he came in. He telephoned at noon to tell her that he was coming out; she kept out of the way so that he would read the letter before she saw him.

He brought it to her and gave it back, folded.

"I suppose I should have told you that business but it was the girl's secret. She didn't want it known and I stumbled on it."

"I see," she answered, inadequately.

"Looks like a bad situation for them, doesn't it? I didn't know, by the way, where she had gone. I assumed she had gone to join him but I did think Sable had driven her to do it. Evidently he sent for her."

"And he nearly died."

They paused in embarrassment. Helen held herself tautly.

"There's an apology due you," she began.

He held his hand out, deprecating it.

"No, please—you had every reason." He changed the subject abruptly.

"Do we let her have the money?" He smiled for a minute. "Money's tight as hell. I haven't got much in cash you know. But I don't see how we can refuse the girl."

"We won't," said Helen.

"By the way, what I came out to say was that Walter's lawyer thinks we should send for Margaret Duffield. There's a rumor that she is his legatee. He had no family—his mother died last year. From what Pratt said he left it all to Margaret. She'll be rich."

"I did wire her," answered Helen, "an hour ago. I thought she ought to know."

"That's good."

"Tell me about it."

"It was all in the paper. He shot himself a little after

midnight. He was alone in his room. It was evidently quite premeditated. There was a sealed letter for his lawyer with instructions—undoubtedly and everything was in perfect order. He—he had simply decided to do it. And he has done it. Something made him lie down—that's all."

He spoke reflectively, with a degree of abstraction that was surprising.

"Why do they think he did it?"

"Heat—not well physically. That's what goes to the papers. Better spread that. If the girl is involved, we'll keep her name clear."

"Oh, yes."

"For Walter's sake," Gage went on. And then very slowly, he added, "I wouldn't like people to know that she got him."

"Yet if it comes out that he left her everything, won't people guess?"

"They won't know. Nor do we know. Nobody knows except Walter and he's dead."

They sent a second wire to Margaret requesting her presence for urgent reasons and by night they had heard that she would come. The funeral was to be on Friday.

It was Thursday evening when the "Town Reporter" bristled with ugly headlines on the streets of St. Pierre. Walter's body lay in the undertaking "parlors" those ineffective substitutes for homes for those who die homeless, in the brief period between their last hours among human kind and the grave. No place except a home can indeed truly shelter the dead. Walter lay inscrutably lonely, in the public parlor, mysterious in the death which was a refusal to go on with life, a relinquishment so brave and so cowardly that it always shocks observers into awe. As he lay there, a raucous voiced newsboy outside the window ran down toward the main throughfare, a



bunch of "Town Reporters" under his arm, shouting, "All the noos about the sooicide"—and in half an hour his papers were gone, some bought openly, some bought hurriedly and shamefacedly. Hundreds of people now knew the reason Elihu Robinson gave for the death of Walter Carpenter, his version of the struggle in the stilled brain of the man he had not known except by sight and hundreds of people as intimate with the tragedy as he, wagged their heads and said wisely that this "was about the truth of it," with other and sundry comments on the corruption of the age and particularly of the rich.

The Flandons read it with mixed disgust and anger. They knew it was the kind of stain that only time could scrub away. It did not matter much to Walter now that he was slandered. His suicide was a defiance of slander. They were sorry for Margaret but not too much bothered by her reception of such scandal if it came to her. It was only local scandal.

"The worst of it," said Helen to Gage, "is tying Gregory Macmillan up that way just as they were about to announce his marriage. I telephoned Freda's father this afternoon for I was going to tell him you had had a business letter from her and knew where she was. It seemed wise. But anyway he had just heard from her too. He was so happy, poor fellow. Now to have this nasty scandal about his son-in-law will be another blow. I shall go to see him and tell him that it's an utter lie. I know from what Margaret told me that there never was a thing between her and Macmillan."

Mr. Thorstad had already taken the matter up with Elihu Robinson. He had called him what he was and his white faced indignation was something the editor preferred to submit to without resistance. But he was not without trumps as usual.

"But who is your authority for saying that Macmillan was implicated with this lady?" asked Mr. Thorstad, angrily.

He had not told that Macmillan was his son-in-law and the editor wondered at his defense of Macmillan.

"My dear fellow," he said with that touch of apologetic and righteous concern with which he always met such attacks. "My dear fellow, your wife told me that."

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE MOURNERS

MARGARET came, calm and yet clearly distressed beyond measure. It was pathetic to see her control, to see that she could not even break through it to the relief of abandonment. She was very white during the day of the funeral and the ones succeeding it and her eyes met other eyes somewhat reluctantly. She came on Friday morning and Helen had not been able to persuade her to stay with them. She had gone to a hotel and from there, quite simply to the parlors of the undertakers.

"Don't wait for me, Helen—and I'd sooner be alone. I'll be here a long while, probably."

Perhaps after all Walter and Margaret found relief in each other when the grim parlor door was shut. At least at the funeral Margaret sat very quietly, though the well-bred curious eyes of the little group of people strayed unceasingly toward her. She went through it as she went through the following days. It was soon known, before the will was probated, that she was Walter's legatee. There was a great deal of business to be done. Walter had decided no doubt that the brief embarrassment of inheriting his fortune was better than the recurrent fear of cramping poverty which had always pursued her and of which she had told him. She saw the lawyers and his business associates and discussed with them the best way of disposing of Walter's interests, and word of her coldness spread around rather quickly and was considered to justify Mr. Robinson's deductions.

Gage saw her at the funeral. He had not looked for



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her—had not felt ready to see her. But in the semicircle of chairs facing the gray satin coffin, he was so placed that his eyes met hers unexpectedly. When they did, hostility glinted in his. "You got him," they seemed to say—and hers looked back steady, unrepentant, even though her mouth was drawn with pain and sorrow.

It had hit Gage as it had Helen. The lightning had been drawn from him. Walter's death had roused in him an instinct of resistance which had been dormant. He had no certain idea of what had passed between Walter and Margaret but he knew what Carpenter's point of view had been—how far he had gone, how willing he had been to yield every concession to a woman—to Margaret—in the belief that it would then be possible to build love on a basis of comradeship. Walter had found failure, just how or why no one knew except perhaps Margaret herself. Gage's mind stumbled along nervously, trying to analyze his and Walter's failure. He remembered how they had talked together about women, how Walter had said he would be "willing to trust to their terms." For some reason he lay dead of their terms. And he himself—he had looked at himself in the glass an hour ago with a kind of horror as if he saw himself for the first time in weeks. There was a softening of his features it seemed to him, a look of dissipation, of untrimmed thought, brooding. The memory of his face haunted him. That was what came of being unwilling to trust to the terms of women. Either way—

He looked across at Margaret again, quiet, firm, persistent through tragedy, through all emotional upheaval, and a grim admiration shot through his hostility. After all she was consistent. With all his admiration for women, even at the height of his passion for Helen, he had never connected her or any woman with ability to follow a line of action with such consistency. He had

some sense of what was going on in Margaret's mind—an apperception of her refusal to let this tragedy break her down.

He became conscious of Helen's sigh. She sat beside him, her hands folded loosely in her lap. The minister talked on, performing with decent civility and entanglement of phrase, the rites of last courtesy for the dead. Gage wondered what he and Helen would do. He was glad that the mess about Freda Thorstad was cleared up. Not that it made any grave difference except in a certain clearness of atmosphere. If she got a divorce she couldn't get it on those grounds. He wondered how their painfully sore minds could be explained in a divorce court which was accustomed to dealing with brutal incidents. Perhaps a separation would be better. He wondered how he was going to provide for her decently. It was going to be a long job building up the new practice. Things were breaking badly.

Some emphatic phrase of the minister, starting out of his droning talk, brought Gage's eyes back to the coffin. Strange how the sense of that silent form within it gave him fresh energy. Life had got Walter. Women had got him, in some obscure way. He felt his shoulders straighten with stubborn impulse. They wouldn't get him. Deftly and logically his thought became practical. He would cut out all this thinking about women. He would—perhaps he would get the Thornton business. It meant a big retainer. He could have done it a few months ago. Now—he visualized old Thornton's tight mouth, keen eyes. He'd want value received. Have to get in shape—cut out the booze—concentrate on business—men's business. The actual phrase took shape in his mind. Men's business. By God, that was how women got you. They got you thinking about them until you became obsessed, obsessed with them and their business.



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It was so and it had always been so. These new problems were not what people thought they were. They were not sex stuff. Perhaps they altered the grain of woman—changed her—but the adjustment of sex was as it always had been, between each man and each woman. Let the women go on, be what they wanted, do what they wanted. It made some of them better, some of them worse—put new figures in the dance but it was the same dance. Even if it wasn't the minuet or the waltz there was still dancing. And there was choosing of partners.

Every one stood up. Gage was standing too, with the rest, his vagrant thoughts brought back from their wanderings to the ever shocking realization that he was helping in the laying away of this friend of his and the inevitable feeling that life was a short business for him and every one. He fell back into triteness. You must play the game.

After it was all over he was standing beside Helen.

"I want to go to see Margaret," said Helen. "I'll go to her hotel now, Gage."

"Bring her home if you like," answered Gage.

The ease of his tone startled Helen. She looked at him in quick surprise, meeting his unexpected smile.

"I merely meant I thought I could be reasonably civil," he said—and with impulse, "I feel rather cleaned out, Helen. I'll run down town now and see what I can do before dinner."

She thought, "He hasn't had anything to drink for two days," placing the responsibility for his unwonted pleasantness on a practical basis. It cheered her. She went to Margaret's hotel and found her in her room, lying on her bed and her head buried in the counterpane. It was the nearest to abandonment that Helen had ever seen in her friend so she ventured to try to comfort.

"It's the awful blackness of his mind that I can't bear,"

said Margaret, "the feeling he must have had that there was no way out." She sat up and looked at Helen somewhat wildly. "It frightens me too. For he had such a good mind. He saw things straight. Perhaps there isn't any way out. Perhaps we are battering our heads against life and each other like helpless fools."

"Did you love him?" asked Helen. It seemed to her the only vital point just then.

Margaret threw her hands out futilely.

"I don't know. I was afraid of what might happen if we married. Either way it looked too dangerous. I was afraid of softening too much—of lapsing into too much caring—or of not being able to care at all. He wasn't afraid—but I was. And—the rotten part is, Helen, that I wasn't afraid for him but for myself."

She was hushed for a moment and then broke out again.

"It wasn't for myself as myself. It was just that if our marriage hadn't been a miracle of success, it would have proved the case against women again."

"You mustn't think any more than you can help," said Helen. "It wasn't like Walter to want to cause you pain and I know he wouldn't want you to suffer now."

"No, he was willing to do all the suffering," said Margaret in bitter self-mockery. "He did it too."

She got hold of herself by one swift motion of her well-controlled mind and stood up, brushing her hair back with the gesture Walter loved. "It's not your burden, poor girl. You have enough."

"Not so many," said Helen. "By the way, Margaret, you haven't heard about Freda Thorstad, have you?"

"Did she come back?"

"No—she wrote. She had married Gregory Macmillan secretly when he was here. They sent her word



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that he had typhoid out West and she went to him. Why she didn't tell people is still a mystery."

"Married him—Gregory? But she'd only known him four days."

Helen nodded. "That's just it. Isn't it—" she stopped, fearing to wound.

"Magnificent—brave—foolish—" finished Margaret. Her voice broke unaccustomedly. "It's wonderful. Gregory will be a strange husband but if she shares him with Ireland and—oh, it's rather perfect. And so all that nonsense about Gage being involved—"

"Was nonsense."

Margaret did not ask further about Gage. She reverted to Freda and Gregory. The news left her marveling, an envy that was wonder in her remarks. She made no comparisons between Freda and herself and yet it was clear that Freda wrought herself to another phase—a step on towards some solution of thought.

Helen urged her to come to dinner.

"I'd rather not, I think. I'll have a rest perhaps."

"Then you'll go out with us for a ride to-night?"

"Gage wouldn't like it, would he?"

"He suggested your coming to dinner, my dear."

They smiled at each other.

"Then I'll go." She turned swiftly to Helen, "Oh, work it out if you can, Helen. Not working it out—is horrible."



## CHAPTER XXIII

### RESPIRE

**F**REDA was trying to mend a blouse. Her unskillful fingers pricked themselves and it was obvious that even her laborious efforts could do little to make the waist presentable. Its frayed cuffs were beyond repairing. However, it would do until they got to Mohawk and she could get the clothes which she had there. She had not written her mother to send her anything. Nor had she spent any of the money the Flandons had sent for such luxuries as new clothes. She had been uplifted when that check for a thousand dollars—not for six hundred—had slipped out of the envelope with Mrs. Flandon's kind, congratulatory letter. Gregory's three hundred had been put back in his purse and then, as it gradually came over her impractical mind that such a sum was totally inadequate to their need she had told him that she had some money of her own—a little reserve which had been sent to her. Naturally he had assumed her father had sent it and later she thought she would tell him that it was a debt they had assumed and make arrangements for paying it. Not now. He must not worry now about the money. She looked across the room at him—their shabby little hotel room, with its lace curtains pinned back for air and the shaky table desk dragged up before the window. He had not been quite fit enough to travel when they left the hospital, and she had insisted that he must try his strength before they made the journey to Mohawk, the first lap on the way back to Ireland. How eager he was to be off now—how,



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impossible it was to check him! She forgot the blouse and sat looking at him, sitting there unconscious of her regard. His profile was outlined against the blank window opening, still so thin, and yet so restored.

"It's getting dark. You ought to stop now, Gregory. You'll be worn out."

He did not hear her. That was one of the things she had found out could happen. Especially since this lot of mail had been forwarded from his bureau, letters full of such terrible news for him from Ireland. His friends were in prison—were killed. Devastation was spreading.

She rose, with a new air of maturity and crossed to him.

"It's growing late." This time she came behind his chair and bent her cheek to his.

He moved absently.

"Yes, sweetheart—I'll be soon through. I was writing to Larry's widow, poor girl. There seemed so much to say."

"I know, but you must stop." She used the appeal she had already learned to use when he was bound to tax his fragile strength. "You'll never get back there unless you rest more."

"Oh, yes I will. And when I do get back—how I'm going to start some things in motion. It will be a terrible swift motion too. I've lost a sad amount of time."

Freda laughed and he looked at her. It was a laugh of pure amusement, and so contagious that he joined her, jumping up from the letter to kiss her.

"No—you laughing rogue—not time lost in winning my bride. Mocker."

Freda held him at arms length teasingly.

"I have you for a minute now, haven't I?"

"You always have me. You don't mind, darling, that they need me? You wouldn't—not share it with me?"

"Of course I share it. And I know I have you—when you remember me."

He buried his lips in her hair and then drew her to his knees.

"Sweetheart, if you could know how they suffer—when you see—"

She composed herself to listen, knowing how it would be. He would hold her close like this and tighter and tighter his arms would feel as he explained and related. Then, in his excitement, he would loose her and leave her, gently, while he paced up and down the room and forgot the tenants in the next room and herself and everything in his impassioned oratory.

So he was. That was Gregory. When he put her down she turned on the light and picked up her sewing. It was not that she did not listen willingly. She did. If she could not kindle in his flame she was warmed in the glow of it. She too had come to care. Perhaps when they reached Ireland and she saw for herself she would kindle too—she rather hoped so.

He stopped talking and his mind, relaxed, shot back to her.

"Do you feel well to-night, darling?"

"Of course. I'm the most indomitably healthy person you ever knew. I can't help it."

"You're so sweetly healthy that I keep forgetting to take care of you."

She tossed the blouse from her restlessly and stretched her long arms back of her head to make a cushion.

"It doesn't bother me when you forget," she told him. "I'm very glad that it doesn't, too. I'm glad I haven't begun marriage by learning habits of dependency. I think we're rather lucky, Greg. Being us, as we are, with a two day wedding trip and a crowning episode of typhoid and now a baby and an Irish question ahead



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of us, we've learned how to stand alone. Mind our own business instead of crowding into each other's, you know."

He did not know. A great deal of modern difficulty and problem making had slipped by him. "You are an obscure young person," he told her, "and most divinely beautiful. I am going to get Francis Hart to paint you—like that, with your head thrown back. I want a hundred paintings of you just to compare with you, so that I can show that no painting can be as lovely as you are."

They spent a week in Mohawk and because Gregory found that Mr. Thorstad knew Irish history with unexpected profundity and sympathy he was content to spend much time with his father-in-law. They met on many points, in the simplicity of their minds, the way they wound their thoughts around simple philosophies instead of allowing the skeins of thought to tangle—in the uncorrupted and untempted goodness of them both and their fine appreciation of freedom—the freedom which in Mr. Thorstad had bade his daughter seek life and in Gregory had tried to unloose the rigors of Margaret Duffield. Gregory did not talk so much to Mrs. Thorstad. He was apt, in the midst of some flight of hers, to look a little bewildered and then become inattentive. She, however, took it for genius. The chastening which she had suffered after that mistake of blackening Gregory's name in connection with Margaret had still some effect. She was anxious to wipe that error out and to that end she worked very hard to establish the fame and name of Gregory. His books were spread over the library table and she had already, in characteristic method, started a book of clippings about him.

She spent a good deal of time with Freda. Freda was

rather more gentle than she had been, and interested honestly in many of the details of child bearing that her mother dragged up from her memory on being questioned. If Mrs. Thorstad felt disappointment in Freda, she tried very honestly to conceal it but now and again there cropped out an involuntary trace of the superiority which she as a modern woman was bound to feel over a daughter who took so little interest in the progress of politics and listened so much to her husband's talk. She spoke of it once only and most tactfully.

"You must be careful not to be a reactionary, my dear. You are going from the land of freedom and the land in which women are rising to every dignity, to a country which may be—of course is bound to be—comparatively unenlightened. I hope indeed that you have your children. Two—or even three children—are very desirable. But you must not forget that every woman owes a duty to herself in development and in keeping abreast of the times which may not be neglected. I don't want to hurt you, dear. Of course I myself am perhaps a little exceptional in the breadth of my outlook. But it is not personal ambition. It is for the sex. Did I tell you that Mrs. Flandon talked to me when she saw me in St. Pierre about doing much of the state organizing for the Republican women? She says she needs some of my organizing ability. I shall help her of course. In fact I hope I may be able to prevail upon your father to apply for a position at the University in St. Pierre. I feel we have rather outgrown Mohawk."

"But, mother, that means an instructorship again for father, and it's a step backward."

"Not exactly that. Think of the advantages of living in the city—the cultural advantages. And there is a great field open in municipal politics. I have some strong friends there—and one gentleman—an editor—even went

so far as to say there might be a demand for me in public life in St. Pierre, if I established residence there."

"It would be pretty rough on father to pull up stakes here—"

The hint came again.

"My dear child, you must not be a reactionary. I do not like to see you start out your married life with the idea of subordinating your life as an individual to a husband, no matter how beloved he may be. It is not wise and it is not necessary. Look back over our life. Have I ever for one moment failed in my duty towards the home or towards my husband or child and has it not been possible at the same time for me to keep progress before me always and to remember that the modern woman owes it to herself to go out of the home and keep abreast with the times?"

But it was not a question. It was a statement. Freda made no reply and her mother changed the subject with the satisfied air of the sower of seed.

"When you come to Ireland," she told her father laughingly that night, "you will sit on the doorstep and learn to smoke a pipe. And Gregory will be president of the Republic. And I will be—(ask mother)—a model housewife, chasing the pigs—"

They laughed with an abandonment which indicated some joke deeper than the banality about the pigs.

"It's a worthy task," said her father. "I'll come—and I'll enjoy learning to smoke a pipe and see Gregory run the government—and as for you—whatever you do you'll be doing it with spirit."

She nodded.

"I've just begun to break my trail."

Then the day came when they must leave the little frame house and after the excitement of getting extremely long railway tickets at the station and checking

all Freda's luggage through to New York, they said good-by to the Thorstads and left them standing together, incongruous even in their farewells to their daughter.

They were to stop at St. Pierre over night. Mrs. Flandon had written to urge them to do so and Freda would not have refused, if she had been inclined to, bearing the sense of her obligation to them. She had not told her father of that. It amused her to think that her father and Gregory each felt the other responsible for those Fortunatus strings of railway ticket. But she wanted Gregory to meet the Flandons again that the debt might be more explainable later on.

St. Pierre was familiar this time when they entered it in mid-afternoon as she had on that first arrival with her mother. It was pleasant to see Mrs. Flandon again and to taste just for a moment the comfortable luxury of the Flandon house. Freda felt in Mrs. Flandon a warmth of friendliness which made it easy to speak of the money and assure her of Gregory's ability to pay it a little later.

"You're not to bother," said Helen, "until you're quite ready. We were more glad to send it than I can tell you. It's a hostage to fortune for us."

Then she changed the subject quickly.

"I wonder if you'll mind that I asked a few people for dinner to-night. You married a celebrity and you want to get used to it. So many people were interested in the news item about your marriage and wanted to meet Gregory and you. I warned them not to dress so that's all right."

"It's very nice," said Freda, "I'll enjoy it and I think—though I never dare to speak for Gregory—that he will too. I remember having a beautiful time at dinner here

before. When I was here visiting the Brownleys you asked me—do you remember?"

"I asked the Brownleys to-night. They were in town—all but Allie. I asked the elder two and Bob and her young man—Ted Smillie, you know."

She looked at Freda a little quizzically and Freda looked back, wondering how much she knew.

"Think they'll want to meet me?" she asked straightforwardly.

"I do, very much. I think it's better, Freda, just to put an end to any silly talk. It may not matter to you but you know I liked your father so much and it occurred to me that it might matter to him if any untrue gossip were not killed. And it's so very easy to kill it."

"You take a great deal of trouble for me," protested Freda.

Helen hesitated. She was on the verge of greater confidence and decided against it.

"Let me do as I please then, will you?" she said smilingly and Freda agreed.

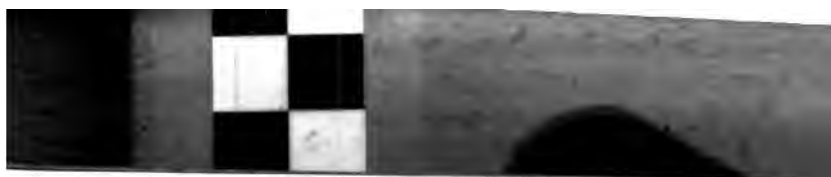
Helen felt a little dishonest about it. The dinner was another hostage to fortune. It was gathering up the loose ends neatly—it was brushing out of sight bits of unsightly thought—establishing a basis which would enable her later to do other things.

She had an idea that it would please Gage, though he had been non-committal when she had broached the idea of having Gregory and his wife for a brief visit. Helen had seen but little of Gage of late. She knew he was working hard and badly worried about money. They had sold a piece of property to raise that thousand for the Macmillans and he had told her definitely of bad times ahead for him. She offered to reduce the expenses of the household and he had agreed in the necessity.



They must shave every expense. But it invigorated Helen. She had amends to make to Gage and the more practical the form the easier it was to make them. Neither of them desired to unnecessarily trouble those dark waters of mental conflict now. Helen guessed that Gage's mind was not on her and that the bad tangle of his business life absorbed him. Brusque, haggard, absorbed, never attempting or apparently needing affection, he came and went. Never since Carpenter's death had they even discussed the question of separation. That possibility was there. They had beaten a path to it. But hysteria was too thoroughly weeded out of Gage to press toward it. Without mutual reproach they both saw that separation in the immediate future was the last advantageous thing for the work of either of them and flimsy as that foundation seemed for life together, yet it held them. They turned their backs upon what they had lost or given up and looked ahead. Helen heard Gage refer some political question to her for the first time, with a kind of wonder. She suspected irony, then dropped her own self-consciousness as it became apparent that he really did not have any twisted motive behind the query. She began to see that in great measure he had swung loose from her, substituting some new strength for his dependence on her love. And, when some moment of emotional sorrow at the loss of their ardors came over her, she turned as neatly as did he from disturbing thought to the work, which piled in on her by letter and by conference.

They sat at dinner in the long white-paneled dining-room, twelve men and women. The three Brownleys and young Ted Smillie—Jerrold Haynes because Helen wanted to have him meet Freda and Emily Haight be-



cause she fitted in with Jerrold now that Walter Carpenter was gone. To these Helen had added the young Harold Spencers because they were the leaders of that group of young people who made or destroyed gossip. It was a dinner party made up hurriedly on the excuse of Gregory's celebrity and such little intrigue as was hidden in its inception made it no less a pleasant company.

Interest was concentrated on Freda and Gregory of course and under Helen's deft manipulation the story of their marriage and its secrecy was told, lightly, but with a clearness of detail that sent Ted's eyes rather consciously to his plate once or twice as he avoided Barbara's glance. Ted was sitting beside Freda and paying her open homage when he could get her attention. But Gage had much to say to her.

"Are you still chasing romance?" he asked. "I always remember your startling me with your belief that women were more attractive when they believed in romance."

"Yes—I'm still after it. I feel the least bit guilty towards Gregory. Because while he goes back to Ireland with his heart in his hands ready to offer it to the country, the whole revolution is to me not as great tragedy as it is adventure. It is tragedy intellectually but not emotionally as far as I am concerned while to Gregory"—she turned her head to glance at Gregory.

"And marriage is adventure too, isn't it?"

She forgot Ted and leaned a confidential elbow towards Gage, resting her chin in her cupped hand.

"I wouldn't dare say it in the hearing of my mother or the feminist feminists but that's what it is. They talk of partnerships and new contracts—but they can't analyze away or starve the adventure of it. All this talk—all the development of women changes things, but its chief

change is in making the women type different—stronger, finer, you know, like your wife and Margaret Duffield. But even with women like that when it comes to love and to marriage it is adventure, isn't it? You can't rationalize things which aren't rational and you can't modernize the things that are eternal." She became a little shy, afraid of her words. "Mother thinks I'm a reactionary. I don't think I am. I want women to be stronger, finer—I'll work for that—but that's one thing, Mr. Flandon. It hasn't anything to do with the adventure between men and women, really."

He started at that. But Ted claimed Freda's attention and reluctantly she turned to him.

"I think you treated me rather badly not telling me you were married. I thought all along that I had a chance, you know."

The brazenness did not make her angry. Nothing could anger her to-night. She was all warm vigor, pervading every contact between her and every one else.

"Barbara looks very well to-night," she answered with cool irrelevance.

Barbara did. She had dressed with her customary skill but with the wit to avoid her usual look of sophistication. To-night she was playing the artless simple girl for Gregory's benefit, listening to him with only an appreciative comment now and then. It was clear that Gregory was talking to her as he talked to one in whom he felt there was intelligence.

"And how clever she is," added Freda reflectively.

The talk grew more general. Barbara called the attention of every one to something Gregory had said, a concession for one who did not usually share her dinner partners or else a successful attempt to break up other conversations. Irish problems led to a discussion of gen-

eral politics. Helen was in the talk now—vigorously. Mrs. Brownley gave the retailed opinion of Mr. Brownley before he could quote himself.

Gage heard without contributing to what was being said. He was listening with amusement to Mrs. Brownley's platitudes and half unconsciously letting his admiration rise at the clarity of Helen's thought and the deftness of her phrases. What presence she had! In the contemplation of her he felt the problems which had been harassing him all day—deadlocks in plans, money shortage, fall away. As they had used to—he slipped into memories and amazingly they did not cause him pain, though even as he looked he saw upon her the marks of the work she had done and would do, the new definiteness, the look of being headed somewhere. But his rancor seemed to have burned itself out and with it had gone the old possessive passion. He stirred restlessly. Some phoenix was rising.

Mr. Brownley turned at his movement, offering sympathy.

"Nothing for us to do, Gage," he chuckled tritely, "except to talk about recipes. The women talk politics now."

Gage did not laugh at the old joke.

"Women and men may get together on a subject yet," he answered, with heavy awkwardness.

Instantly it seemed to him that it was what he had meant to say for a long time. He caught the incredulous, almost pitiful look on Helen's face as she heard and pretended not to hear, met the quick, wondering glance she snatched away from him.

Her tremulousness gave him confidence. Impatient of his guests now, he looked across at her, his eyes kindling. Whether they could work it out through his storms and

hers ceased to gnaw at his thought of her. He saw her strong, self-sufficient, felt his own strength rising to meet hers, also self-sufficient. The delight of the adventure, the indestructible adventure between man and woman remained. His mind moored there.

THE END







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